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# *Claude Chabrol's Aesthetics of Opacity*

**by**

**Catherine Dousteyssier-Khoze**

**Je n'ai aucune zone d'ombre. Je suis absolument transparent. Opaque à force d'être transparent.**[1]

Claude Chabrol

[1] In *Claude Chabrol, Pensées, répliques et anecdotes*, p. 9. [‘I have no grey areas. I am completely transparent. I am so transparent that I am opaque’.]

# Table of contents

**List of illustrations**

**Acknowledgements**

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This book is dedicated to my whole family.

# Introduction

Claude Chabrol famously said that one of his key priorities was ‘ne pas emmerder le public’ [‘not to bore the audience stiff’].[1] It is therefore slightly provocative to apply the label of ‘opacity’ to a director who always prided himself on the accessibility and entertaining values of his films. Yet, his overtly anti-elitist and popular approach to cinema was by no means achieved at the expense of creativity, artistic standards and depth of meaning. And one can get some precious insight into the ‘Chabrol paradox’ through another light-mooded yet revealing quotation of his: ‘Ce qui est drôle, c'est de faire des plans avec deux ou trois strates de lecture’ [‘Making shots with two or three reading grids, that’s what’s fun’].[2] Much of what follows will be devoted to uncovering these intricate layers and threads which, film after film, however different or successful these are, contribute to the making of a shimmering, complex Chabrolean mosaic.

When Chabrol died in September 2010, he left behind him 54 full-length features, as well as a large number of TV films and three shorts.[3] His next project was to be an adaptation of a Simenon novel, *L'Escalier de fer*, featuring Isabelle Huppert as a cold, sex-crazed homicidal maniac. This was Chabrol’s second missed opportunity to adapt one of his favourite authors – indeed, he almost started his career by making *Le Fils Cardinaud* based on Georges Simenon’s 1943 novel[4] – and, no doubt, a great loss for Cinema insofar as the combination of the thriller genre and the portrayal of a complex, enigmatic woman/murderess by Huppert has always been a winning one for the director (*Les Biches*; *Violette Nozière*; *La Cérémonie*; *Merci pour le chocolat*).[5]

The aim of *Claude Chabrol's Aesthetics of Opacity* is to explore the aesthetics of the French director, covering the full spectrum of his works from his first film (*Le Beau Serge*,

1958), which launched the Nouvelle Vague, to his last one (*Bellamy*, 2009), with Gérard Depardieu in the leading role. Chabrol's cinema is generally associated in the collective mind with a type of psychological thriller or melodrama set in the bourgeois confines of the French provinces. Anthologies and dictionaries of cinema, especially French ones, have not been exactly kind to Chabrol, often reducing his films to a mere satire of the bourgeoisie, and providing a superficial and even misleading reading of his *œuvre*. For instance, Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, in his *Histoire du cinéma français* (1995), discards Chabrol's films of the mid-70ies to mid-90ies as '[une] production abondante et paresseuse' ['an abundant and lazy production'] characterised by 'des comédies policières goguenardes' ['self-deprecatory comedy thrillers'] and 'des drames méchants' ['vicious dramas'][6] and, according to him, Chabrol's adaptation of *Madame Bovary* is an example of the 'pire cinéma de la Qualité' ['the worst of the Tradition of Quality cinema'].[7] Even his best films of the late 60ies and early 70ies (including what is arguably Chabrol's most remarkable and multi-layered film, *Le Boucher*) are described rather flatly as 'un moment d'une comédie humaine qu'il inscrit méthodiquement à chaque fois dans un paysage social rigoureusement défini, parisien ou provincial, dont il donne une image uniformément négative' ['a moment in a human comedy that he methodically inscribes, every time, in a rigorously defined social landscape, either in Paris or in the Provinces, and of which he gives a uniformally negative image'].[8] Chabrol is therefore neatly (and conveniently) labelled as the prime observer and satirist of the bourgeoisie: watchable but very uneven and limited in scope and ambition. For Jean-Claude Biette, Chabrol is 'l'homme centre' ['the centre-man'] who 'accepts the narrative conceptions of the moment and does not impose his own creative stamp'.[9] As we shall see, nothing could be furthest away from the truth.

In this first detailed reappraisal of his filmography (1958-2009), we shall discover how complex and multi-layered Chabrol's cinema is. An aesthetics of opacity is brought to the

fore, which deconstructs from within the apparent clarity and 'comfort' of the generic frame. His films are accessible to a wide audience and yet they offer many interpretative grids, thereby ensuring that ambivalence and opacity prevail in the end. For the careful viewer, cracks keep appearing in his films, which allow a constant game or exchange between the 'real' and the virtual. The representation of 'reality' (that is the precise, detailed, at times quasi ethnographic anchoring into the provincial bourgeoisie) is overturned in more or less subtle ways (strategies include the use of intertextuality, reflexivity – theatricality and games of mirrors – , uncanny details, ellipses and expressionist *mise en scène*) and the image acquires a variety of meanings up to the point when it becomes a cipher. The more one watches Chabrol, the more one is aware of underlying currents and symbols that are to be found under the surface, and the more elusive his films become. As Chabrol himself let on at the time of the release of *La Cérémonie*, in 1995: 'mon grand plaisir, c'est de révéler l'opacité' ['my great pleasure is to reveal opacity'].[10]

This monograph seeks to reassess the place and significance of Chabrol's filmography in French Cinema, as well as provide an analysis of the key themes, motifs and devices that recur in his films. The work consists of six chapters and a Conclusion, 'Towards an aesthetics of visual opacity'. Chapter 1 (Contexts and Influences) pays particular attention to Chabrol's 'Nouvelle Vague' films and the great diversity and experimental quality of his early palette. Rather than focusing on the well-established influences (Lang, Hitchcock, Renoir), this chapter will unveil the crucial role played by Balzac in shaping Chabrol's 'aesthetic of the mosaic'. Chapter 2 (Chabrol and Genres) shows, via different case studies (*Le Boucher*, *La Fille coupée en deux*, *Masques* and *Bellamy*), what Chabrol does with and to genres. Thus, *Le Boucher*, although a relatively 'stable' thriller, turns at the end into a philosophical investigation of the human condition (based on Kubrick's *2001 A Space Odyssey* as a hidden, hitherto unidentified, intertext). The other case studies examine how Chabrol's use of

reflexive modes and strategies allow him to pursue his in-depth exploration of the human under the alibi of the genre film. Chapter 3 (The Human Beast) focuses on the various figures of the monster or 'human beast' (the serial killer; the automaton and the female killer): firmly anchored within an ideological framework but decidedly opaque and fragmented, these liminal figures help rethink and problematize the concepts of normality. In Chapter 4 (Family Secrets) the Family, consistently presented as the breeding grounds for pathologies, is under investigation through the following key themes and motifs: incest; the couple; family rituals and the figure of the patriarch. Chapters 5 and 6 (Chabrolean Spaces as Heterotopias of Crisis; Through the Looking Glass: Chabrol's 'Crystal-image'), form a diptych that shows how the actual and the virtual, or illusion and reality, keep intermigling at various levels in Chabrol's cinema. An illusory space-time, on which Chabrol's aesthetics of opacity is principally based, is created that jeopardises the representation of reality. Chabrolean spaces such as the boarding house in *La Rupture* or the 'glass house' in *Juste avant la nuit* are therefore revealed as unstable, overcoded spaces in which conflicts and tensions acquire a symbolic quality while the constant use of mirrors, *mises en abyme* and other reflexive structures (in *La Fille coupée en deux* or *L'Enfer*, for instance) enable the director to subvert the representation of reality by making it look oneiric and uncanny, and raise questions about spectatorship.

Given that the purpose of this book is to unveil the most salient features of Chabrol's *œuvre* and draw attention to his overall mosaic, the study will neither stick to a strictly chronological approach nor consist of a string of contained, one-per-film analytical pieces. Indeed, in some case studies, the analysis of a given film will be inevitably divided into a few different chapters: specific features from *Le Boucher* are for instance extensively analysed in Chapter 2 (Chabrol and Genres) and others in Chapter 3 (The Human Beast) while *Violette Nozière* is studied in depth in both Chapter 3 (The Human Beast) and 5 (Chabrolean Spaces

as Heterotopias of Crisis), in order to unveil specific facets of the film. However, in order to avoid unnecessary repetitions, too many cross-chapter references or an overly fragmentary analysis of the films, various films will be primarily studied under a single chapter heading, according to the thematic or conceptual aspect that is focussed on in most detail, even if this sometimes means providing extra material which does not, at first sight, appear to 'belong in' that chapter (for instance, I shall provide an overall presentation and analysis of *Une partie de plaisir* in the chapter dedicated to 'Chabrolean Spaces as Heterotopias of Crisis', simply in order to focus of the fantastical, oneiric, uncanny dimension that the bourgeois house takes on in a sequence of that film). Hopefully, this 'dual economy' or compromise (films presented either in segments or in a single occurence) will allow us to identify salient, recurrent aspects without fragmenting too much the analysis of given films.

In terms of theoretical framework and methodology, unashamedly modelling ourselves on Chabrol (who, for his own part, followed in Balzac's footsteps), we shall follow a somewhat eclectic, mosaic-like approach in order to reveal the multi-layered nature of the Chabrolian opacity: various tools will be used, ranging from genre theory, to Foucault's concept of heterotopia, to the Deleuzian 'crystal-image' and detailed film analysis. Genre-based studies, of course, usually concentrate on a corpus of films by various directors. Even though this monograph is limited to a single director or *auteur* – that is to a 'Nouvelle Vague' conception of the film director as a key artistic figure with a unique vision − it will nonetheless focus closely on the generic discourses at play within Chabrol's films. Specifically, the tensions between different generic codes and conventions will be emphasised in order to explore some of Chabrol's key themes such as the opaque nature of madness and evil, the theatricality of family relations and social constructs and the fragility of appearances.

Deleuze's concept of the 'crystal-image' in particular, as discussed in his seminal work *Cinéma 2: l'image-temps* [*Cinema 2: The Time-Image*] (1985), will be used to demonstrate how Chabrol challenges the realistic grounding or representation through a recurrent use of *mise en abyme* and reflexivity. Although Deleuze did not have much to say about Chabrol's cinema *per se*, his concept will prove extremely useful to explore the nature of the fluid and playful relationship between illusion and reality in Chabrol's films, and the resulting opacity. One of Chabrol's major achievements in his uneven, mosaic-like *œuvre* is indeed the honing of a crystal-image which contains in itself myriad possibilities and interpretations that cancel each other out. The representation of reality is fissured, tipping over into the virtual where characters and (generic) identities fragment. Whilst some films are, in generic terms, relatively stable, others such as *La Fille coupée en deux* (2007) seem to function as a medium inviting us both to re-evaluate the rest of Chabrol's work and to consider a different perception of cinema via an interrogation of spectatorship/reception. Through an array of recurring themes and motifs – forbidden desires and pulsions, masks and mirrors, theatricality and puppets, fragmented family relations, voyeurism, secrecy and inscrutable female characters –, Chabrol's deceptively-accessible, reflexive films encourage us to reflect on the relationship between the actual and the virtual, between illusion and reality and, ultimately, on the status of the cinematographic image.

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[1] Sorg, 'Chabrol fait le Malouin', p. 35. See Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 4.

[2] *La Demoiselle d'honneur*, DVD supplement, 'Un air de rien'. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are mine.

[3] See Filmography, **pagination** (based on Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, pp. 232-237). For the purposes of this book, we shall only focus on the full-length features.

[4] Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 232.

[5] However, his last film, *Bellamy*, bears the mark of Simenon. As Odile Barski, Chabrol's long-standing scriptwriter (and co-writer of the screenplay) pointed out, *Bellamy* was meant as a 'faux Maigret'. See Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 205.

[6] Jeancolas, *Histoire du cinéma français*, p. 101.

[7] *Ibid.*, p.101.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

[9] Biette, 'Claude Chabrol: l'homme centre', p. 93. Quoted and translated by Kline, *Screening the Text*, p. 87.

[10] Guérin and Jousse. 'Entretien avec Claude Chabrol', p. 30. Also quoted in Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 5.

## Chapter 1: Contexts and Influences

In a career spanning over half a century, Chabrol directed 54 full-length films, an output that is generally considered to be very uneven, ranging from highly-acclaimed films such as *Le Boucher/The Butcher* (1969) or *La Cérémonie/Judgement in Stone* (1995) to dated flops (see for instance the make-to-order spoofs of the 1960s such as *Marie-Chantal contre docteur Kha/Marie-Chantal vs Dr Kha*) which were made when he needed funds and had no choice but to take on such projects. Chabrol is well known, and often criticized, for his pragmatic approach to cinema, his compromise between commercial and aesthetic considerations.[1] In one extreme case, he even agreed to make a film (*L'Œil du malin* [1961]) with only half of the original budget.[2] He saw himself as an 'artisan' ['craftsman'] rather than as an artist.[3] Hence, perhaps, his hybrid status as a popular director in France and abroad but one who is decidedly underrated.

In an editorial entitled 'Chabrol méconnu' published in les *Cahiers du cinéma* right after Chabrol's death in 2010, Stéphane Delorme summarises the situation as follows:

> [La] mort de Chabrol touche largement, tant des films comme *Le Boucher*, *Que la bête meure* ou *La Cérémonie*, furent immmensément populaires. Pour autant, son statut de grand cinéaste n'est pas autant assuré auprès des cinéphiles que celui de Godard, Rohmer, Rivette ou Truffaut. Les raisons sont multiples: trop de films réalisés, trop de films importants invisibles, trop de films populaires que l'on croit connaître, à tort. Les éloges de toutes parts ont même un peu vite transformé Chabrol en bon oncle sympathique mijotant plus

> ou moins toujours la même recette. Quelle recette? Le portrait de la bourgeoisie, servie au choix en gelée, en fricassée ou en pâté.[4]
>
> [Chabrol's death is of concern to many given that films such as *Le Boucher*, *Que la bête meure* or *La Cérémonie* were immensely popular. However, his status as a great director is not as firmly established with film specialists as Godard's, Rohmer's Rivette's or Truffaut's. There are multiple reasons to this: too many films; too many important films that are invisible; too many popular films that one is convinced of knowing, and wrongly so. The various praises have only too quickly turned Chabrol into a pleasant old uncle, who has but one recipe in his cooking repertoire. What recipe? The portrayal of the bourgeoisie, served either in aspic, fried or as a pâté.]

Indeed, in terms of scholarly recognition, Chabrol's work is still largely overlooked; he cannot bear comparison with his Nouvelle Vague contemporaries, especially with Godard or Truffaut whose films have received extensive critical attention. Ironically, while Chabrol himself (together with Truffaut, Rohmer and other Nouvelle Vague critics) contributed to the reassessment of Fritz Lang's and, especially, Hitchcock's artistic status by pointing out that a great artist or *auteur* could work within the confines of a genre, he has often been seen himself as a proponent of genre cinema and has not been taken very seriously for the greater part of his career.

Chabrol did not fare particularly well either in terms of awards and official recognition from the industry: he neither received an Oscar (nor was nominated for one in the foreign film award category) nor a César. One of the best films of all times, *Le Boucher*, obtained a single prize, the Bodil Award for Best Non-American Film in 1971 (awarded by the Danish Union of Film Critics). After a Golden Bear for *Les Cousins* (1959), at the very beginning of

his career, he had to wait until 2000 in order to get the Louis Delluc Prize (*Merci pour le chocolat*), 2003 for a Lifetime Achievement Award at the European Film Awards and 2005 for a René-Clair Prize. In 2009, he had to share a Berlinale Camera with Günter Rohrbach. And he only obtained the Grand Prix of the SACD (Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs dramatiques) three months before his death, in 2010. As one of his key producers, Marin Karmitz, who worked with him from 1984 until 2002, put it:

> Claude Chabrol a été incroyablement mal considéré par l'intelligentsia du cinéma. Tous les films que j'ai faits avec lui ont été systématiquement refusés par les gens censés donner de l'argent. Même *La Cérémonie* a été refusé par l'Avance sur recettes. [...] Quand il a reçu le prix Louis Delluc en 2000 pour *Merci pour le chocolat*, ça m'a époustouflé.[5]
>
> [Claude Chabrol has been incredibly ill-treated by the cinema intelligentsia. All the films I made with him were systematically rejected by the people who were supposed to provide money. Even *La Cérémonie* was rejected by the Advance on earnings (...). I was flabbergasted when he was awarded the Louis Delluc prize in 2000 for *Merci pour le chocolat*.]

Even though there has been a measure of re-evaluation of his filmography since the 1990s (with, for instance, special issues of *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1997, 2006 and 2010 and of *Positif* in 2011), one finds remarkably few comprehensive, book-length studies on Chabrol. In French, apart from the collections of 'Pensées et répliques' and some (auto)biographical publications, there are no more than a handful of monographs – by Blanchet (1989), Braucourt (1971), Magny (1987) and Wilfrid (2003) –, which are either dated or somewhat uninspiring (for the latter). As for Michel Pascal's relatively recent *Claude Chabrol* (2012), although it provides useful background material on the key films (especially in terms of their

reception) and interesting interviews with actors and close collaborators, it does not seek to engage with the films in any significant detail. Besides a handful of articles in specialist journals (such as Jean Narboni's piece on *Violette Nozière* for *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*)[6], it is worth mentioning, however, a couple of excellent articles by Jean-François Rauger: one entitled 'Claude Chabrol, cinéaste anti-naturaliste' (1994), which identified what is in our view at the very core of Chabrol's aesthetics, namely the conflict within the image between the actual and the virtual. As Rauger put it, in his analysis of extracts from *La Femme infidèle* and *Que la bête meure* (and *L'Enfer*, in the following pages): 'On peut dire alors que se joue chez Chabrol [...] un conflit entre une situation actuelle et une situation virtuelle qui aurait pu avoir lieu' ['One could say that what is at stake in Chabrol's films is the conflict between an actual situation and a virtual situation that could have taken place'].[7] Rauger said a little further (and he even mentioned Deleuze, although merely in passing and without referring to the crystal-image *per se*): 'Il ne s'agit pas, dans le montage, de suturer un espace homogène mais plutôt de faire coexister deux espaces différents: un virtuel et un actuel, un fantasme et une réalité' ['Editing is not about stitching up a homogeneous space but rather about making two different spaces coexist – a virtual one and an actual one; fantasy and reality'].[8] This is, overall, a very insightful piece which perfectly grasped the fact that 'chez Chabrol [...] les situations sont toujours de l'ordre de l'indécidable. Il y a [...] une réflexion sur la réalité des images' ['In Chabrol's films, situations are ultimately undecidable. There is a reflection over the reality of images']9 In another, very short, article, 'Un autre monde' ['Another world'], Rauger reiterates this key point, which will be central to our approach:

> La mise en scène, chez Chabrol, est donc caractérisée par cette manière de faire sentir, dans le cadre ou par le montage, l'existence d'un 'autre monde', virtuel, fantasmé, tout en rappelant perpétuellement son impossibilité.[10]

> [In Chabrol's films, the *mise en scène* is therefore about unveiling, either within the frame or through the editing proces, the existence of 'another world' – virtual, fantasised – while constantly providing reminders that it cannot exist.]

Anglo-saxon criticism has also produced a few insightful analyses of the director's work: Guy Austin's *Claude Chabrol* (1999) for Manchester University Press's series on French Film Directors is the best book on Chabrol to date. It is an excellent introduction to Chabrol's films in that it provides an overview of key films, themes and techniques. However, it only discusses films up to 1997 (Chabrol would make another seven films before his death in 2010) and needs updating. Jefferson Kline's chapter on Chabrol ('In the Labyrinth of Illusions: Chabrol's Mirrored Films') in *Screening the Texts. Intertextuality in New Wave French Cinema* (1992) is a very illuminating and sophisticated analysis of early films by Chabrol, in particular *Le Beau Serge* and *Les Cousins*. In particular, Kline has investigated the Chabrolean mirror motif that is pivotal to Chabrol's aesthetics.

However, there is still much catching up to do and the proposed study intends to produce a critical reappraisal of Chabrol's films by exploring his aesthetics as a whole. This chapter will therefore revisit Chabrol's pivotal role in launching the so-called Nouvelle Vague and analyse the development of his film style throughout the years. Special attention will be paid to his approach to film-making and the reception of his films.

**The *Nouvelle Vague* and Chabrol's first films**

Chabrol thought little of the label famously coined by Françoise Giroud in *L'Express* of 3 October 1957: 'En 1958 et 1959, les copains des *Cahiers* et moi, passés à la réalisation, avons été promus, comme une marque de savonnette. Nous étions "la nouvelle vague"' ['In 1958 and 1959, my friends from les *Cahiers [du cinéma]* and I, started directing films and we were

advertised like a brand of soap. We were “the New Wave”’].[11] He would go on repeating over the years a version of his witticism: "il n'y a pas de vagues, il n'y a que la mer' [‘There are no waves, there is just the sea’].[12] And when invited on the programme *Ce soir ou jamais* for a special issue celebrating 'Les 50 ans de la Nouvelle Vague' [The New Wave’s Fiftieth Anniversary],[13] Chabrol admitted 'On avait l'impression que c'était une escroquerie' [‘We felt it was a fraud’] before going on to provide his own down-to-earth definition: 'La Nouvelle Vague, c'était des types qui écrivaient dans les *Cahiers* qui se sont mis à faire des films' [‘The New Wave was about guys who were writing for les *Cahiers* and started making films’]. Indeed, like Truffaut, Godard, Rohmer, Rivette, Chabrol started his career in the 1950ies as a critic for les *Cahiers du cinéma*. Without undergoing any formal training, he went on to produce and direct his first film, *Le Beau Serge*, from scratch, thanks to an inheritance made by his first wife. Crucially, that inheritance allowed him to set up his own production company, AJYM (named after his wife and two sons: Agnès, Jean-Yves and Mathieu – the same Mathieu who will become responsible for the music of Chabrol’s films from 1982 onwards), to start making his first films and help his friends get started as well as directors/producers. Indeed, the Nouvelle Vague can initially be seen as a kind of film ‘cooperative’ (Chabrol used the word himself)[14] in which the *bande des Cahiers*, after a few trials and errors, shared screenplays, actors (Belmondo, Gérard Blain, Jean-Claude Brialy, Bernadette Lafont…) and helped produced one another’s films. Chabrol who, among other things, produced Rivette’s *Le coup du berger*, Rohmer’s *Le signe du Lion*, co-produced (with Truffaut) Rivette’s *Paris nous appartient* and co-wrote (also with Truffaut) the screenplay for Godard’s *A bout de souffle*, was at the very centre of that dynamic network. His groundbreaking low-cost production practices (no set designer, sound engineer nor make-up person ; young, unknown actors),[15] paved the way for others to follow and played a key role in revitalizing what was essentially before a very expensive, studio-dependent cinema.[16] As

Richard Neupert put it, 'Chabrol functioned as one « carrier wave » that propelled the New Wave forward'.[17]

*Le Beau Serge*, quickly followed by *Les Cousins*, is arguably the very first film of the Nouvelle Vague. Even though Truffaut had made *Les mistons* in 1957 and Godard *Tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick* (made in 1957 and released in 1959), 'Chabrol is often acknowledged as the « first » New Wave director by most historians today, with *Le beau Serge* and *The Cousins* recognized as « the breakthrough films of a new generation » or « the lightening bolts » announcing the New Wave'.[18] Neupert also notes that 'at a time when the French press was full of accounts of a New Wave in the cinema, Chabrol was promoted as the central agent of change'.[19] Thanks to *Le Beau Serge* and *Les Cousins*, he was hailed as a big success story : he received the Jean-Vigo award for *Le Beau Serge*, as well as the best director's award at Locarno,[20] while *Les Cousins* was the recipient of the Golden Bear for best film at the Berlin festival and sold 416,000 tickets (only to be surpassed by Truffaut's *Les Quatre-Cents coups* with 450,000 entries while Godard came in third with 380,000 for *A bout de souffle*).[21] Such critical and commercial reception allowed him to find producers[22] (the Hakim brothers) and retain full control over the casting and aesthetics choices for his next two films : *A double tour* (1959) and *Les Bonnes Femmes* (1960). Both films (especially *Les Bonnes Femmes*) turned out to be far less successful than his first two. *Les Godelureaux* (1960) did not fare any better and, from that moment on, Chabrol started to struggle to find producers. 1960 marked the end of his successful, 'independent' *Nouvelle Vague* era, and for the next few projects – *L'œil du malin* (1961), *Ophélia* (1962) and *Landru* (1962) –, he had to compromise on aspects of the film-making process (budget, casting). In the mid-sixties followed a number of flops or purely commercial films (or both), from the *Tigre* series to *La Ligne de démarcation* (1966), *Le Scandale* (1966) and *La Route de Corinthe* (1967). At the time of his eventual rebirth, heralded by *Les Biches* (1967), the ex-prodigy and leader of the

*Nouvelle Vague* pack was considered a wash-out and a sell-out by many critics and fellow directors; he could not secure any financing for his personal projets, and it would take a string of masterpieces in the late 60ies and early 70ies for him to (partially) regain his reputation as an *auteur*.

In order to understand better the great diversity of Chabrol's *Nouvelle Vague* palette, we shall examine here his first four films : *Le Beau Serge* ; *Les Cousins* ; *A double tour* and *Les Bonnes Femmes*. Although *Le Beau Serge* and *Les Cousins* work very well together as a 'diptych' – while, in the former, a city boy is returning to a dreary countryside plagued by alcooholism and incestuous relationships, the latter is devoted to a country cousin going to study in Paris and exposed to the temptations and evils of the metropolis –, these four films could hardly be more different, at least at first sight. However, they each offer insights into recurrent Chabrolean motifs that will be explored throughout this study : the gradual blurring of the realistic representation in *Le Beau Serge* as well as the underlying presence of incest and the dysfunctional family dynamics; the expressionistic, proleptic mise en scène that emphasises the lethal quality of the love triangle in *Les Cousins* ; the self-reflexive structure and formal games of mirrors in *A double tour* ; and the voyeuristic, oppressive atmosphere of *Les Bonnes Femmes*, in which evil acquires a quasi mythological dimension.

***Le Beau Serge***

Filmed during a few weeks in the winter of 1957-58 in Sardent (Creuse), where Chabrol had spent the war years at his grandmother's, *Le Beau Serge* probably remains Chabrol's most autobiographical film (in spite of the director's future – and sometimes tongue-in-cheek – claims, that it is *Rien ne va plus* or *Bellamy*). The loss of a baby (as experienced by Serge); the Parisian returning to his provincial roots; François' health problems and, above all, the tormented relationship with religion (Chabrol confessed to having lost his Catholic faith at

around the time he made the film)[23] are all autobiographical features. A first version of the screenplay had originally been submitted to Rossellini who turned it down[24] but, as we shall see, *Le Beau Serge* bows to Italian neorealist cinema. It also draws on Hitchcock's *The Manxman* (through the tormented relationship of two childhood friends – a local fisherman and a lawyer in Hitchcock's film), which Chabrol praised lavishly in the study of the director he co-wrote with Rohmer. Chabrol even makes a cameo appearance *à la* Hitchcock in the film, as a character who made an inheritance – a *clin d'œil* to his own situation. As the 'acte officiel de la naissance' ['official birth certificate'][25] of the *Nouvelle Vague*, *Le Beau Serge* sets up a number of markers of the movement: young, unknown actors, outside shooting in natural light; flexible, diverse camera mouvements and angles – see for instance, at the beginning of the film, the two rather intriguing high angle shots on the coach when François arrives in town: Chabrol is clearly exploring all sorts of technical possibilities and form is never at rest in *Le Beau Serge*. It is used to lay bare the spiritual crisis that underpins the film: overall, *Le Beau Serge* is indeed characterised by a deep, quasi-Bergmanian religiosity that will not reappear in the rest of Chabrol's filmography.

The film centers around the tormented friendship between François (Jean-Claude Brialy), a city dweller who returns to his home village to further restore his frail health and Serge (Gérard Blain), his childhood friend. In fact the two characters spend most of the film looking for one another and not being able to do so or, when they do, not being on the same wavelength and even, on one occasion, coming to blows. As Austin noted, 'the clash of personalities [between François and Serge] heralds the power struggles between the Charles and Paul characters that were to appear in *Les Cousins* and again in the Hélène cycle'.[26] François' distinct Messiah tendencies drive him to try to save Serge (from Yvonne, with whom he is expecting a child, and from a life of alcoholism and misery as a truck driver) while Serge, for his part, deeply resents what he perceives as François's patronizing

interference and blames him for his lack of understanding and insight into the village life and life in general. The whole film is constructed around the supposed (moral, social) opposition between (bad) Serge and (good) François. But nothing is quite what it seems in the film and Chabrol was keen to guide the viewer through another reading grid hidden behind the first one: 'En effet, au-delà des apparences, une vérité, peu à peu, doit se dégager pour le spectateur: l'instable, le complexé, le fou, ce n'est pas Serge, mais François.[27] However, in typical Chabrol fashion, even that 'truth' is far from obvious and the last shot of the film, a dissolve on Serge mad, laughing face is open to interpretation.

To the dual nature of the characters corresponds two overlapping generic layers or grids: the neo-realist / naturalistic anchoring is competing throughout the film with a highly symbolical (and religious) dimension, with the latter clearly prevailing at the end of the film. Firstly indeed, *Le Beau Serge* reminds Italian neo-realist films through its focus on everyday life, social reality, attention to detail, location shooting and documentary style.[28] It is also perhaps the most 'Zolian' or naturalistic of all Chabrol's films in its portrayal of the French rural world: the representation of the village, plagued by alcoholism and incest, is strongly reminiscent of Zola's *La Terre* in its pessimistic and deterministic approach. In typical naturalist fashion, the villagers (Serge, Glomaud, Yvonne and Marie) are portrayed as animals subject to their basic instincts; they seem to be trapped by hereditary and environmental forces and to lack any sense of deep purpose (Serge's tragedy being that he used to have aspirations but got bogged down in village life). Chabrol was particularly keen to represent Sardent as accurately as possible by filming real village life and characters (the actual baker making bread; school children on their way to school, etc.), hence the documentary quality of a number of sequences (as the film was too long, he had to make cuts into this documentary material).[29] However, the naturalist dimension becomes quickly undermined by both the symbolical/religious dimension and the stylistic devices, such as the

use of music. The latter, at times, seems to parody melodramatic practice and attracts the attention on style. As Neupert put it, '[the soundtrack] foregrounds Chabrol's playful presence and marks the alternation of diegetic versus nondiegetic and realistic versus artificial stylistic techniques that will continue to structure the narrative itself, as well as other stylistic parameters ranging from camera to editing'.[30] Such reflexive feature is a precursor of the dissonances or exploration/disruption of the dialectics between soundtrack and visual content that characterize many *Nouvelle Vague* films – *A bout de souffle* for instance. Neupert also notes that 'while the constantly shifting perspective and formal play are not always immediately obvious, they are partly responsible for the shallow, often contradictory characterizations'.[31] By the end of *Le Beau Serge*, however, the diegesis is increasingly oneiric and de-realized and the formal play becomes more obvious – see for instance the last, expressionistic, shot of Marie and Glomaud locked together in the bedroom while the door slowly closes on them: a powerful and pessimistic comment on the fact that there is no escape from their incestuous relationship –, although it is not always easy to interpret.

The symbolical dimension takes on a quasi fairy-tale quality which goes hand in hand with the religious grid:Yvonne as a poorly clad woman picking wood in the snow in the forest could as easily refer to a character from a Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale as evoke Biblical scenes.[32] The neo-realist/naturalist dimension is subverted as the whole narrative is imbued with a religious subtext: François, who is lying behind a barbed wire, strongly resembles, or indeed parodies, a Christ figure (see the dissolve on his face covered with blood and flakes of snow) and, at the very end, his masochistic attempts to locate Serge are ironically equated with the stations of the cross.[33]

The figure of the priest is also central to the narrative insofar as he acts as a decoder for the viewer. Indeed, he is particularly (suspiciously?) perceptive; he seems to be able to see through François and guides the viewer's interpretation of François' acts when he

bluntly tells him: 'Imbécile, tu te prends pour Jésus Christ. [...] C'est de l'orgueil' ['Idiot, you think you are Jesus Christ. That's pride']. But far from being a positive, enlightening force, he is cast as a dark and calculating figure who only shows up when François is in a position of weakness. Through the two characters of François and Serge, *Le Beau Serge* stands in many respects as a parable of man encountering/fighting evil within himself. There is a certain Pascalian resonance to the film ('l'homme n'est ni ange ni bête, et le malheur veut que qui veut faire l'ange fait la bête' ['Man is neither angel nor beast, and unfortunately whoever wants to act the angel, acts the beast'])[34]: through his hubris, François offers a rare, singular (for Chabrol) interpretation of the human beast or monster whose various facets the director keeps exploring in his filmography. Although marred by the somewhat heavy-handed religious symbolism – *Le Beau Serge* is Chabrol's way of coming to terms with his loss of faith –, the film can mostly be seen as an experimental laboratory in which the director tries to get a grip on film language in order to start exploring what will become the staples of his (thematic and stylistic) repertoire: incest and dysfunctional family relationships; and subtle reflexive games that contribute to a gradual blurring of the borders between reality and illusion, thereby raising key questions about genre, spectatorship and the making of a new filmic image.

***Les Cousins* (1959)**

The film, made in a studio, was meant by Chabrol as a companion piece to *Le Beau Serge* and the story of an 'unvolontary murder'. Without being a thriller *per se*, *Les Cousins* contains an ominous sense of menace vehiculed by an expressionistic *mise en scène*. 'Ce sera, j'espère, à la fois rigolard et inquiétant' ['I hope it will be both jokey and sinister'], said Chabrol,[35] a mixture that he will indeed re-use time and time again. In the first instance of a long-term collaboration, his friend Paul Gégauff wrote the dialogues. Gégauff's sulphurous

influence can be seen through one of the main characters' fascination for Fascism.[36] *Les Cousins* tells the story of Charles (Gérard Blain) who comes to stay in Paris with his cousin Paul (Jean-Claude Brialy) in order to prepare for his law exams. When Charles first enters the apartment, Paul moves abruptly the telescope he is holding in order to focus it on Charles: although done in jest, there is something threatening about both the gesture and the rifle-like telescope, and the use of ominous music further emphasises the proleptic quality of Charles' entrance into Paul's den. Introduced by Paul to a world of wild students parties, Charles soon falls in love with Florence (Juliette Mayniel), who eventually decides to go for the more glamorous Paul. Indeed, in a reversal of the La Fontaine fable,[37] the hard-working and serious Charles ends up loosing constantly to the fickle, cynical and morally dubious Paul (Charles also fails his law exam whereas his lazy cousin succeeds). Desperate, Charles attempts to kill Paul in his sleep by playing Russian roulette with Paul's gun. He does not succeed and the strange shot that follows, with luminous busts and heads, lends an eerie, fantastical quality to the scene. The morning after, Paul, not knowing that the gun is loaded, shoots his cousin dead by accident – a rather stylized, expressionistic scene, in which light and shadows fill the screen. The last shot focuses on an LP player: the end of the disc playing in Paul's apartment coincides with the end of *Les Cousins* – a metaphorical curtain that emphasises the theatrical quality of the film.

Besides the Balzacian references to *Les Illusions perdues* and *Le Père Goriot* that underpin the narrative,[38] *Les Cousins* also owes much to Renoir's *La Règle du jeu*, as Richard Neupert pointed out.[39] Thematically speaking, Charles reminds of Jurieu's character as an outsider who does not understand the rules of the game, loses the woman he loves and meets a tragic death and, formally, Chabrol's long takes and 'highly metaphorical spatial configurations' are also reminiscent of Renoir's film.[40] As for the recurrent presence of an automaton in Paul's apartment, it can be perceived as a nod towards the marquis de la

Chesnaye's passion for mechanical objects in *La Règle du jeu*. The flexible camera and the use of deep space allow Chabrol to put in place, like Renoir, a complex choreography of characters.

However, the key metaphor for the studio-made apartment remains the fish-tank and, in that, Chabrol is somewhat closer to Vigo than to Renoir. Indeed, when filming Paul's apartment, Chabrol often resorts to a type of carefully organised, full, claustrophobic shot reminiscent of the 'plan-aquarium'[41] ['aquarium-shot'] that Bergala had identified as a key feature of Jean Vigo's film aesthetic. According to Bergala, a 'cinéaste de l'aquarium' or 'aquarium-director' is a 'cinéaste de la mise en bocal des corps dans un espace-milieu limité comme le volume d'eau contenu entre les parois de verre. [Il aime] à voir flotter ces corps dans un milieu dont [il] contrôle la densité et dans un espace borné d'où […les] personnages ne pourront pas s'échapper, ni se perdre' ['a director who puts bodies in a jar, in a limited space, just like the volume of water is contained between the glass walls. He likes to see those bodies floating around in a milieu whose density he controls and in a limited space from which his characters will neither be able to escape nor get lost'].[42] Although Paul's apartment is bigger that the tiny cabins in *L'Atalante*, Charles often gives the impression of being trapped and evolving within the walls of a fish-tank. Significantly, there are two references to fish-like characters within the diegesis : when Charles writes a letter to his mother, he tells her that 'Paris est une ville merveilleuse et Paul a l'air de s'y trouver comme un poisson dans l'eau' ['Paris is a marvellous city and Paul looks in it like a fish in water']; and during the party organised by Paul, Philippe makes a scene and leaves, saying 'Qu'est-ce que vous avez tous à me regarder avec vos yeux de poisson ?' ['Why are you all looking at me like this with your fish eyes ?'] Right after Philippe's exit, as an illustration of his statement, Chabrol inserts what is arguably the most striking shot of the whole film : an 'aquarium-shot' in which the loud music/sounds of the party become suddenly muffled and

the various guests seem to be observed through a glass jar. Chabrol will resort to this type of shot again in *Les Bonnes Femmes*[43] and in some of his later films (in *Betty*, for instance, where the last shot of the eponymous character is filmed through a fish tank, giving her an eerie, seductive quality whilst hinting at her predatorial, pirhanna-like features). In *Les Cousins*, the party guests' behaviour and silent gesticulation is made all the more pointless through this extra glass lens.

**[Insert Image 1. *Les Cousins*]**

Without being associated to the point of view of a specific character, the shot is very subjective ; it both de-realizes the diegesis and casts a satirical light over the characters. These are judged coldly indeed ; they are nothing but fish evolving in slow motion around the living-room and, when the party starts degenerating, a number of very high angle shots, reinforces the impression that the characters are trapped in the tank-like apartment. We could also relate this 'aquarium-shot' to some comments made by film director Rainer Werner Fassbinder. In a rather scathing article entitled 'Insects in a Glass Case. Random thoughts on Claude Chabrol',[44] Fassbinder asserts that Chabrol is like a child observing insect-like characters in a glass case :

> Chabrol's viewpoint is not that of the entomologist, as is often claimed, but that of a child who keeps a collection of insects in a glass case and observes with alternating amazement, fear and delight the marvellous behaviour patterns of his tiny creatures. [...] he does not investigate but merely glances at them [...].[45]

While the criticism is unduly harsh (we shall see later in the chapter that Chabrol's approach is similar to Balzac's in providing a rich and nuanced Human Comedy), there is something in this entomological metaphor that rings true with regards to *Les Cousins* (and *Les Bonnes*

*Femmes*),[46] in that the characters are observed at times, if not exactly like insects, like fish swimming in an aquarium.

Through this type of shot, Chabrol starts honing a type of 'crystal-image' that is recurrent throughout his filmography and allows him to cast suspicion over the reality of the diegesis. Deleuze's comments on Ophuls' 'cristaux parfaits' or perfect crystals fit the above-mentioned shot to perfection : 'On the track or in the crystal, the imprisoned characters bustle, acting and acted on, a bit like Raymond Roussel's heroes exercising their prowess at the heart of a diamond or a glass cage […]'.[47] And just like Ophuls' monsters, Chabrol's characters 'pursue their round in frozen and iced images'.[48] As in *Le Beau Serge*, the diegesis is far from being realistic throughout the film. However so subtly, whether it be through the use of theatricality (Paul's candle-lit, 'Nazi' performance is embued with a strange, oneiric quality), the expressionistic *mise en scène* or the distorted aquarium-shots, 'reality' sometimes flickers and cracks as the world of *Les Cousins* is filtered through a fantastical lens.

***A double tour* (1959)**

*A double tour* is the most overtly experimental film of Chabrol's *Nouvelle Vague* period : the circularity of the narrative, ambitiously echoed by the camera mouvements (see the dizzyingly slow opening pan that closes up on a lampshade-shaped spiral – a metaphor for the film itself), as well as the flashbacks, all contribute to creating a profound sense of claustrophobia. As Chabrol put it, 'le film devait représenter un cercle qui se dédouble sur lui-même' ['The films was meant to represent a circle that splits into another circle'].[49] The use of flashbacks is particularly innovative : rather than fulfilling either the investigative or the confessional functions that are generally associated with the flashback as a technique,[50] the flashbacks are mostly used in *A double tour* in order to complicate and delay the

narrative, and blur the timeline. For instance when do the two separate, dream-like walks taken by Henri Marcoux and his mistress Léda take place ? The blurring of narrative time makes the viewer wonder whether the walks did take place in the 'reality' of the diegesis or whether they were illusory.[51]

Before Godard, Chabrol can be credited for having 'discovered' the actor Jean-Paul Belmondo,[52] who plays here a very similar character to the one he is to portray a few months later in *A bout de souffle* : as in Godard's film, he is called Lazlo Kovacs and displays the same mix of misogyny and cheekiness ('Salut, la grosse' ['Hello, Fatso']). The shots in which he is seen driving around a fountain at the beginning of *A double tour* are very 'Nouvelle Vague' (impression of spontaneity and improvisation ; shooting on location in natural light) and prefigure the sharp editing and free-wheeling style of *A bout de souffle*. A mix of thriller and melodrama, *A double tour* focuses on the fragmentation of a bourgeois family : the mistress of a rich bourgeois, who is about to leave his wife and grown-up children, has been brutally murdered. The *femme fatale*, and murder victim, Léda (Antonella Lualdi), has clear mythological connotations (although slightly distorted, parodic ones : see the recurrent imagery of the peacock that replaces the swan of the mythology) that tend to de-realize her from the beginning. Significantly, the first appearance of Léda is as a mirror reflection, as if the object of desire was a mere fantasy or dream image.

The film is built like a classic tragedy : as Chabrol noted, 'toute l'histoire tient en une journée' ['the whole story takes place within a single day'][53] and is essentially located in one place (or, more precisely, in two neighbouring properties). Besides the use of flashbacks, the fact that the film is divided into different acts or scenes punctuated by musical interludes and that the theatrical metaphor pervades the whole narrative (the unfaithful husband will reproach his upset wife about 'ton théâtre'), contribute to de-realizing the diegesis. Indeed, the characters are often excessive/overacting – especially Belmondo /Lazlo and the mad son,

Richard Marcoux – and dolls and statues (the latter being a key Chabrolean ingredient that will reappear over and over again) play a key part in the film : they seem to encourage the viewer to look for similarities between characters and inanimate objects, thereby casting suspicion over the representation of 'reality' and introducing an expressionistic element of menace and a subdued sense of fantastic.

In the first shot, the use of the dolls/figurines, strewn on the floor in a proleptic vision of Léda's body, is particularly chilling and original : right from the beginning, the dolls are closely associated to violence and death, and in this, Chabrol prefigures their extensive use to come in the horror genre (in the Italian *giallo* to start with).[54] During the murder sequence, Richard's blend of fascination and revulsion towards the dolls and various figurines that inhabit Léda's Japanese house – we are to understand that she is an artist –, becomes apparent : the shot in which he holds, at arm's length, the armless doll made by Léda is particularly striking in this regard. He also makes a half-hearted attempt to cut the hair /wig of one of the dolls with scissors in a chilling prolepsis of the violence to come. In that 'other space'[55] of blurred mirror images, dolls, shadows and eerie music, Richard's own madness and twisted perception is given free rein. His encounter with the dolls acts as a catalyst : when entering Léda's house, Richard seems to enter the 'uncanny valley' identified by Masahiro Mori, according to which dolls, mannequins and other human replicas elicit feelings of uncanniness and revulsion among human beings.[56] And one could/should, of course, trace this back to the notion of 'uncanny', famously analysed by Freud in his seminal 1919 essay.[57] Nicholas Royle, drawing on Freud's essay, states that 'the uncanny can be felt in response to dolls and other lifelike or mechanical objects'.[58] As for Susan Yi Sencindiver, she notes that 'the doll in its various permutations is endowed with a unique auratic presence susceptible of acquiring an uncanny hue'.[59] What is at stake here, as we shall see in Chapter 6

about the crystal-image, is the opacity of meaning and representation that arises as a result of the blurring or cross-contamination between the animate and the inanimate.[60]

The silent, static dolls and figurines certainly increase the sense of menace and foreboding ; to a large extent, they function as ominous doubles for Léda and prefigure her death. As far as Richard is concerned, the thin line between illusion and 'reality' becomes completely blurred when, after having examined the dolls and talked to Léda, he looks at himself in the mirror. His fragmentation is represented quite literally through the shot in which he breaks the mirror, trying to destroy his own reflection in a gesture of self-hatred. Following this fit of madness or dissociation, Richard is uncapable of distinguishing between Léda (who is indeed constantly objectified throughout the film) and the dolls. But, in an ironic twist, by killing Léda, he has inadvertently revealed his own doll-like quality: he has turned into a doll with murderous intent ('Je me sens devenir tout petit, minuscule […] je suis venu pour vous tuer' ['I feel that I am becoming tiny, minuscule (…) I have come to kill you]) and, after strangling Léda, he runs back to his house in a very stylised and stiff way, looking himself like a mad puppet, and casting a veil of uncanninness and suspicion onto the whole diegesis as a consequence. Far from resorting to a realistic mode of representation, in *A double tour* Chabrol seems keen to create a world or stage inhabited by puppet-like characters in order to interrogate the very notion of 'reality'. Another scene is worth mentioning in this respect : when Belmondo/Lazlo Kovacs is having breakfast in the garden, next to a statue, he is joined by the mother, Thérèse Marcoux, and other members of the family. The atmosphere is tense because the father has just kissed his mistress goodbye in front of her neighbouring house, in his wife's full view. An overacting Belmondo launches a little performance, behaving as if he were on stage, bolting around and touching the statue (that looks very much like Léda), thereby attracting the viewer's attention on it. Then, in one striking full shot on Belmondo, the family and the statue, all the characters look suddenly

frozen, as if they had themselves turned into statues.[61] The viewer is therefore bound to question the status of the characters and their relationship to 'reality'[62]. The complex and fluid relationship or exchange between characters and statues/automatons participates in the process of reflexivity and theatricalisation that is inherent in Chabrol's aesthetics. As we shall see, Deleuze's concept of 'crystal-image' will be particularly relevant to analyse such shots in which 'automata and living beings, objects and reflections enter into a circuit of coexistence and exchange which constitutes a « theatricality in the pure state »'.[63] *A double tour* is Chabrol's experimental and hyper-reflexive 'turn of the screw'.

***Les Bonnes Femmes* (1960)**

*Les Bonnes Femmes* is nowadays regarded – and rightly so – as one of Chabrol's best films and it has been a source of inspiration for many film directors over the years. For instance, the creator of the TV series *Mad Men* (2007-2015), Matthew Weiner, who worships the film, asked all his collaborators to watch *Les Bonnes Femmes* before embarking on the cult series.[64] And Kubrick readily admitted that the nightclub scene in *Clockwork Orange* (1971) was inspired from *Les Bonnes Femmes.*[65] However, the film, whose subject matter was misunderstood and regarded as vulgar, aroused bitter controversies at the time of its release. Based on a script and dialogues by Paul Gégauff, the film portrays the (somewhat dull) lives of four female shop assistants in post-war Paris, one of whom ends up murdered at the end by a mysterious boyfriend. Because of the absence of a narrative voice, the representation of the tedium and banality of everyday life, as well as the lack of depth of the female characters, were interpreted by critics and audience alike as a sign of arrogance and cruelty on the director's part.[66] Chabrol vehemently denied the accusations of misogyny and arrogance in his treatment of the *bonnes femmes* of the title, arguing instead that his clichéd and shallow female characters were supposed to convey and denounce alienation.[67] And, in fact, the film

could very well be perceived as an indictment of misogyny and male violence. Without any exceptions, the male characters are repulsive, caricatural, grotesque and/or dangerous and they treat women like mere objects. Albert and Marcel are represented as pathetic serial womanizers and grotesque clowns who are equated with pigs (see the recurrent close-up on the big nose and mask-like faces at the party); the women's boss at the shop is a pervert and a dirty old man ('Mon plaisir est de réprimander les petites filles' ['I take pleasure in telling little girls off'], he informs Jacqueline on her first day at work); Rita's bourgeois boyfriend is both stuck-up and patronizing; the poet who comes to visit the women at the shop is shown as a leech trying to get money out of Mme Louise; as for Ernest, the mysterious motorcyclist and object of Jacqueline's fairy-tale/Romantic fantasies, although he first seemed to be Prince Charming material (ironically, he rescues Jacqueline from the other men's coarse behaviour at the pool), he is ultimately revealed as a (serial?) killer and the worse of them all. Men have no redeeming features whatsoever in *Les Bonnes Femmes* and it is difficult not to see that Chabrol's sympathies rather lie with the women who are trapped in a stifling, man-dominated world: could it be one of the reasons why the film had such a controversial reception rather than the 'official' one, according to which he despised his women characters?

*Les Bonnes Femmes* is a very 'Flaubertian' film in that, not only does Chabrol propose in it a satirical parody of Romantic ideals (Jacqueline is a working-class Emma Bovary whose boredom and unattainable yearnings are responsible for her death) but he also strives to achieve the filmic equivalent of the 'livre sur rien'[68] or 'book about nothing': that is a creation whose thematic content deals with trivia, mediocrity, boredom (see the long sequences in the shop where nothing worth 'narrating' happens) and whose strength lies in its 'style' or formal features. The controversial reception of the film stems, at least in small part, from a marketting error made by the producers: indeed, the Hakim brothers thought nothing of advertising *Les Bonnes Femmes* as a light, saucy comedy about some coquetish

*Parisiennes*. The viewer's expectations were undermined right from the opening sequence of the film (in which a man leaves a night-club and throws up on the street) and the film was thoroughly booed during its *avant-première* at the Normandie cinema on 20 avril 1960.[69] *Les Bonnes Femmes* is also found wanting ideologically: Chabrol is accused by some of his detractors of fascist sympathies, probably due to his close association to Gégauff and in the wake of *Les Cousins*, in which some of the characters jokingly display fascist/Nazi features.[70] Paul (Brialy) had even used the very phrase 'les bonnes femmes' in *Les Cousins* ('On a déconné un peu partout avec les bonnes femmes' ['We've been fooling around about everywhere with the girls']), thereby providing an easy – if fleeting – connection between the two films.

The audiences were shocked by Chabrol's 'non-humanistic brand of Naturalism'[71] and the 'vulgar' content – see the sequence in which Jane (Bernadette Lafont) is telling a man that she can't have sex because of her period – caused outrage. As a consequence, a number of scenes (20 minutes altogether) were censored and the film was forbidden to the under 18 – *Les Bonnes Femmes* was only restaured to its original version in 2000, by Chabrol's friend Charles Bitsch and by Béatrice Valbin.[72] Interestingly, the reception of the film reminds that of key nineteenth-century novels, and perhaps more specifically here Zola's publication of *Thérèse Raquin* in 1867 and the whole controversy surrounding the launch of the Naturalist movement. According to critic Louis Ulbach (in *Le Figaro* of 23 January 1868), Zola's novel was a prime example of a brand of 'littérature putride' or 'putrid literature'. In 1960, almost a century later, Michel Capdenac's rhetoric in *Les Lettres françaises* is remarkably similar when he refers to *Les Bonnes Femmes*, as 'un remugle de putréfaction' ['a stench of putrefaction'].[73] Just like the Naturalist movement for literature, the Nouvelle Vague possesses the ability to shock and challenge the visual expections of its contemporaries. But,

unlike Zola's novel, the 'scandal' factor was not synonymous with success for *Les Bonnes Femmes*' and the film marked the end of Chabrol's honeymoon period with critics and audiences alike.

Austin rightly argues that in *Les Bonnes Femmes* 'Chabrol mixed together two distinct elements in an unsettling synthesis: neorealim and thriller, tedium and suspense, banality and menace'.[74] But the neorealist dimension (crude, naturalist details; focus on a working-class environment; documentary-style sequences of post-war Paris) and the thriller genre compete with other features as well within the narrative: a fairy-tale/fantastic motif helps bring to the fore a self-reflexive dimension which reaches its climax in the enigmatic last sequence of the film. The (parody of) fairy-tale or fantastic dimension is primarily vehiculed through the character of Jacqueline and the effect that the mysterious blood-soaked handkerchief owned by Mme Louise has on her life and the narrative. Jacqueline, who is cast from the beginning as different from the other women (less frivolous, sensitive, a daydreamer looking for true love), is punished in *Les Bonnes Femmes* for wrongly casting Ernest, the mysterious motorcyclist following her, in the role of Prince Charming. She makes a lethal mistake in confusing a psychopathic stalker with a Romantic hero and by naively placing her trust in the protective powers of a 'magical object': Mme Louise's secret fetish – a handkerchief soaked in the blood of guillotined serial killer Weidmann, also known as 'le tueur au regard de velours' ('the killer with a velvet gaze'). Mme Louise agrees to share her secret with her, telling her 'j'espère que ça vous portera bonheur' ['I hope it will bring you luck'] – a bitterly ironic statement in retrospect given that Jacqueline herself will end up being murdered by a character similar to Weidmann. Through both the type of shots used to film the handkerchief sequence (extreme close-up shots on Jacqueline's and Mme Louise's faces) and the sudden irruption of an ominous extradiegetic music when Mme Louise finishes telling the story,

Chabrol ensures that a symbolical/proleptic meaning is ascribed to the scene within the narrative.

Is Jacqueline disappointed as the recipient of Mme Louise's story? She slightly flinches in recoil when the handkerchief is displayed but fails to grasp the full significance of the episode and discards as similarly irrelevant to her story any detail that does not fit with her Romantic views (such as Ernest's crude jokes in the restaurant). Chabrol subverts here both Jacqueline's and the viewer's expectations: Mme Louise, a kind, mild-mannered middle-aged woman, was supposed to produce some sort of Romantic trinket rather than derive pleasure from such a gruesome relic. Through this reflexive sequence or *mise-en-abyme*, Chabrol challenges the viewer's own scopic drive and mix of fascination/repulsion for evil, murder, blood. This pivotal sequence, located in the middle of the film, also refers to Chabrol's following comment: 'Mon film charriait aussi les peurs élémentaires: la nuit, le mal, le sang. Parce que nous sommes polis par notre civilisation si brillante, ces peurs anciennes n'existeraient-elles plus en nous?' ['My film vehiculed elementary fears as well: night, evil, blood. Does the fact that we are polished by our so brilliant civilisation mean that these ancient fears no longer exist within ourselves?'].[75] When watching a film, the viewer derives pleasure from these fears and, through the extreme close-up on Mme Louise's radiant, slightly repulsive face, Chabrol's holds a distorted and disturbing mirror in front of us. As spectators, and specifically spectators of thrillers, we are suddenly faced with our own voyeuristic drive. Susan Hayward states that 'the psychological thriller bases its construction in sadomasochism, madness and voyeurism. The killer spies on and ensnares his victim in a series of intricate and sadistic moves, waiting to strike'.[76] This definition certainly applies to *Les Bonnes Femmes*: we know that the women are being followed and spied on and we *want* something to happen.

Chabrol often resorts to an expressive use of montage to indicate that Jacqueline is doomed. At the zoo, the shot that captures her smiling and playing with a scarf around her neck, lost in Romantic musings over Ernest who is watching her, is abruptly followed by a shot on a large snake – a fitting prolepsis for her strangulation by the devious, lethal motorcyclist. And at the precise moment when she calls a caged tiger 'amour', the camera ironically closes up on Ernest's worrying, mad smile as if to emphasise the discrepancy between her perception of things and the diegetic reality, and her failure at identifying predators of all sorts. The film is full of such warnings, often accompanied by an ominous soundtrack, which end up de-realizing the diegesis and embuing it with a quasi fantastical sense of menace. The powerful, carefully-constructed zoo sequence also contains a number of reflexive episodes that encourage the viewers to reflect on their own position: see for instance, the striking shot in which the camera is placed behind the glass cage with the desert fox. The viewer is left to observe Jacqueline and her three friends as if they were themselves caged animals.

**[Insert Image 2. *Les Bonnes Femmes*]**

This is a 'plan-aquarium' as coined by Bergala, in the sense that the characters are, as he put it, 'mis en bocal' ['put inside a jar']: from that angle, they look trapped in a sort of glass tank and there is indeed what Bergala had identified as a 'versant sadique' ['sadistic side'] to this type of shot.[77] However, ironically, the viewer also looks trapped in the cage in that shot, left to observe the characters as if behind a one-way mirror. So, who is watching whom in that dizzying crossing of gazes and to what effect? The characters are looking at the desert fox, while the viewer is looking at all of them as if they were one and the same species (and some of the accusations of 'cruelty against his characters' levelled against Chabrol no doubt stem

from shots like this), but the plot thickens when the next few shots (including slow reverse tracking shots) unveil yet another gaze: Ernest's. The choice of camera angles underline the fact that there are *two* anonymous presences or voyeurs spying on the women and their friend in that scene: the film viewer(s) and Ernest. Trapped between these converging gazes, Jacqueline doesn't stand a chance: Ernest doesn't want to let go of his prey and the viewer wants the thriller to unfold. And this identification or overlap of purpose between the viewers and Ernest (soon to be unveiled as a killer) is rather uncomfortable for the former who are therefore strongly encouraged to question their own position and the legitimacy of what they are doing.

The self-reflexive dimension reaches a climax at the very end of the film in a sequence that disrupts and clashes with the diegetic logic in the sense that it is, apparently, disconnected from the previous events. Indeed, none of the previous characters are identifiable at this *soirée dansante*. However, there is a vague and disturbing feeling of *déjà vu*: a lonely, dreamy young woman with a slender neck, very reminiscent of Jacqueline, is observed from a distance by a man, whose face we do not get to see, and invited by him to dance. Could this be the first stage of the predator/victim dynamic we have just witnessed or is it all innocent? By refusing to provide an answer, Chabrol clearly challenges the audience: it is up to the viewer to decide what happens next, either to give the woman a chance at romance or make her the next victim of an Ernest-like character. As Austin pointed out, '*Les Bonnes Femmes* is perhaps above all a film which explores spectatorship'.[78] However, he is wrong, in our view, to assume that this 'certain new-wave self-consciousness [...] is not present in Chabrol's later work':[79] whether it be subtle or very visible, self-reflexivity is at the very heart of Chabrols' aesthetics, as we shall see throughout this study. This sequence encourages the viewers to distance themselves from what they have just seen and question the status of this (apparently) separate narrative. Indeed, it functions as an extra layer that

introduces a degree of suspicion as to the 'reality' of the diegetic world and undermines both the neorealist and the thriller genres. Reflexivity prevails through the recurrent extreme-close up on the woman's face, a *regard caméra* shot that seems to invite the audience to ask themselves a number of questions: what is the link between the two narratives? how 'real' is this? where is the spectacle?[80] where does it start and end? What have we just witnessed and what part or responsibility do we have in it?

**Key influences**

The impact of Lang, Hitchcock and Renoir on Chabrol's films is well documented so we shall not dwell on it in great detail here.[81] Chabrol confessed that Fritz Lang's blend of realism and poetic vision had 'une influence primordiale' ['a paramount influence'] on his own film-making, 'soit directement, soit par ricochet en passant par Hitchcock, qui lui doit beaucoup' ['either directly or, on the rebound, through Hitchcock who owes him a lot'].[82] Indeed, he borrows from Lang an objective camerawork and a deeply expressionist *mise en scène*. As Odile Barski, who co-wrote numerous scripts with Chabrol, pointed out:

> Aux sources de sa grammaire, Claude revendiquait l'héritage de Fritz Lang. Bien sûr il était « renoirien », notamment avec ses tournages en décors naturels. Mais Lang était son maître majeur à cause des lignes de force qui chargent le quotidien d'une dimension fantastique. Un hyperréalisme qui allait dans cette direction. Un cinéma de plans construits, cadrés selon la ligne claire. Le film *Dr M* (1990) était son hommage à Lang, et il a été déçu que ce titre ne soit pas mieux perçu par la critique comme par le public.[83]

> [At the source of his grammar, Chabrol claimed the Fritz Lang heritage. Of course, he was 'Renoirian', especially with his filming on location. But Lang was his primary master with his guiding lines that embue everyday life with a fantastic dimension. Some kind of hyperrealism that was going in that direction. A type of cinema with constructed shots, framed along a clear line]

Here are two beautiful, striking examples of this expressionistic/Langian streak which gives to certain shots, if not a properly 'fantastic' or Gothic dimension as they sometimes do, at least a deeply symbolical, metaphorical meaning. They show that Chabrol has moved very far indeed from the type of neorealist/naturalistic cinema that might have tempted him at his very beginnings, in *Le Beau Serge* for instance (at least in the greater part of the film). The first one shows Isabelle Huppert/Mika's shawl lying on a sofa in *Merci pour le chocolat* (2000). The shape of the shawl is a clear indicator to Mika's venemous nature : she is like a spider waiting for her victims to fall into her web.[84]

**[Insert Image 3. *Merci pour le chocolat*]**

In the second one, taken from *La Fleur du mal* (2002), two women, tante Line and Michèle, are filmed through a birdcage. This metaphor of entrapment, as we shall see in detail in chapter 4, functions as a clear indictment of the stifling bourgeois environment.[85]

**[Insert Image 4. *La Fleur du mal*]**

Both are very carefully constructed shots, in which every object has its place and meaning. Chabrol has complete mastery of what enters the field. He is a 'cinéaste du plan' as defined by Bergala : 'C'est quelqu'un dont le plaisir, au cinéma, est d'abord celui de faire des plans,

un par un, sans trop sacrifier de ce désir inaliénable au surmoi du film comme future totalité' ['It is someone whose pleasure, when making films, is first and foremost to make shots, one after the other, without sacrificing too much of this inalienable desire to the film's superego as future totality'].[86] And Bergala to remind that the watchword of the Nouvelle Vague was 'Une idée par plan !' ['One idea per shot'].[87] In Chabrol's case, Lang's influence means that these shots (and they are numerous such examples in his œuvre) acquire a symbolic painting quality. They are to be scanned for clues as to the nature or fate of the characters.

Alfred Hitchcock is of course another key influence on Chabrol. Before co-signing the study on Hitchcock with Rohmer in 1957, Chabrol also wrote a few articles for the *Cahiers*, including 'Hitchcock devant le mal' and the account of an interview of Hitchcock that he conducted with François Truffaut for the same special issue on Hitchcock. During that interview, Chabrol managed to get the director to reveal some of the 'motif[s] dans [sa] tapisserie'[88] (a metaphor very similar the that of the mosaic, which will be central to Chabrol's œuvre), namely the metaphysical dimension present in some of his films. Hitchcock also admitted to Chabrol, 'Je ne suis pas réaliste du tout. Je suis attiré par le fantastique' ['I am not a Realist in the least ; I am attracted to the fantastic'],[89] a confession that, by emphasising the common ground with Lang, must have had a serious impact on Chabrol : as we shall see, the recurrence of a diffuse kind of Gothic will play a considerable role in his own films. And like Hitchcock, Chabrol hides behind the thriller genre in order to indulge in his favourite topics (pathologies ; madness, evil, obsession, sexual perversion).

Chabrol was literally obsessed with Jean Renoir – he confessed to having watched *La Règle du jeu* more than eighty times –[90] and, as we shall see in Chapter 6, he borrows from Renoir a certain taste for theatricality and excess, which filters through a general *parti pris* de réalisme.[91] Beyond this well-known triad, Chabrol's close friend, Paul Gégauff, [92] a writer,

actor and director, also had a considerable impact on the first part of his filmography as his favourite screenwriter : from *Les Cousins* (1959, for the dialogues only) to *Une partie de plaisir* (1974), he collaborated with Chabrol on ten films. Chabrol famously met him in Paris at Le Celtic film club in the Latin Quarter when, dressed as a Nazi officer, he interrupted the screening of a British war film.[93] Gégauff was a talented but toxic and self-destructive scandalmonger who fascinated Chabrol and brought him the note of provocation and cruelty he needed for his films. Quite in keeping with his persona, Gégauff died a premature sensationalist death in 1983 when he was stabbed on Christmas day by his young Norwegian wife. Significantly, Gégauff was the prototype for the character of Paul in the Charles/Paul duo which is to be found in numerous Chabrol films (with Charles functioning as a Chabrol alter ego).[94]

It is worth focusing now in greater detail on another extensive but, in this case, underexamined influence on Chabrol: Balzac's.

**Balzac, the mosaic and myths[95]**

Though Chabrol never adapted any of Balzac's works, the presence of the *Comédie humaine*'s author can nonetheless be felt throughout the former's films. Indeed, Balzacian characters might be said to haunt a part – or even the whole – of his œuvre. And Balzacian ramifications run even deeper, occurring at multiple levels in Chabrol's films: intermittently through various references to Balzac's novels; in the form of more-or-less obvious intertextual traces woven into several films (*Les Cousins* [1958]; *Le Boucher* [1969]); and, perhaps most of all, in the Chabrolean aesthetic, from the conception of the work and links to the film as a whole to the overall cinematographic production. When we read, or rather watch, Chabrol in the light of Balzac, there is a double issue at stake: understanding the way

in which the director holds up a mirror to the great nineteenth-century writer in the films of the following century, and seeing how Balzac continues to be present and in what guises. But the Balzacian 'key' also brings coherence and complexity to Chabrol's work, and enables us to better understand the director's aesthetic.

Claude Chabrol's œuvre contains direct links to the literature of the nineteenth century, from his adaptation of *Madame Bovary* (1991) to the TV films made shortly before his death, 'La Parure' (2007) and 'Le petit fût' (2008) [*Chez Maupassant, Contes et Nouvelles*], as well as 'Le Petit Vieux des Batignolles' (2009) by Gaboriau [*Au siècle de Maupassant*].

But what, precisely, are his links to Balzac? In press reviews dedicated to him at the time of his death, Chabrol was hailed as the 'Balzac du cinéma' ['Balzac of the cinema'] or 'Balzac à la caméra' ['Balzac with a camera'].[96] However, according to Rainer Werner Fassbinder Chabrol was no Balzac: 'In Chabrol, France has no critic, no twentieth-century Balzac (the role in which these films indicate he would like to see himself); but France does have an embryo cynic in Chabrol, a cynic with enormous nostalgia for the naïve, for lost identity'.[97] We certainly cannot accept this peremptory judgment, not least because the tangential points leap out at us as soon as we compare, even in a highly general manner, the work of Balzac and Chabrol. Both addressed the mores and lifestyles of country-dwellers and the bourgeoisie, and both made close studies of marriage, family relationships, and women. But no one has yet conducted a deep and systematic examination of the parallels between the two artists. Beyond the clichés ('Balzac à la caméra', etc.), and links that are perhaps as obvious as they are artificial, it is worth focusing in greater detail on these parallels.

According to Balzac, the true artist looks for the truth behind the façade,[98] an approach that certainly suited Chabrol, a filmmaker dedicated to the breaking-down of

appearances and social facades, and whose entire œuvre could be called *La Comédie humaine*. Through the key figure of the monster/murderer – and from the generic angle of the thriller or crime drama – Chabrol offers a very dark view of humanity in his films. Darkness and madness are hidden beneath the (often bourgeois) surface veneer of civilisation. Ambivalence and opacity mark characters and filmic universe (qualities that are also applicable to Balzac's world and characters). But Balzacian pessimism and Chabrolean darkness are, perhaps, of differing natures. According to Ariette Michel, Balzac denounced social vice above all: 'La société présente dans *La Comédie humaine* offre […] l'image de la perversion liée à un individualisme forcené, à l'égoïsme outrancier, l'intérêt personnel' ['The society presented in *La Comédie humaine* offers (…) an image of perversion linked to fanatical individualism, to outrageous egoism, and to self-interest'].[99] Though social vice is certainly present in Chabrol's work (at the very heart of his bourgeois universe), the roots of this evil seem to go deeper; see the allusions to atavism and the world of uncontrollable urges in *Le Boucher*, for example, which refer back to a pre-social and prehistoric human reality. From this perspective, the Chabrolean human animal seems more reminiscent of Zola than Balzac.[100] Therefore it is not in the nature of evil that we must seek Balzac in Chabrol, but rather – disregarding the 'direct' intertextual presence of Balzac in some of his films – in the reappropriation (or subversion) of the Balzacian technique in the characters, the development of myths, and the conception of Chabrol's work as a whole.

Chabrol places himself deliberately within the tradition of Balzac by claiming ownership of the 'mosaic' approach (a metaphor used by Balzac in the preface to *Une fille d'Ève*: 'Il n'y a rien dans ce monde qui soit d'un seul bloc, tout y est mosaïque' ['Nothing in this world is all of a piece; everything is a mosaic']][101] and the right to heterogeneity in his work:

À partir de 1832, Balzac passe de l'écriture de romans à l'écriture d'une œuvre et dès que l'idée d'une conception d'ensemble se fait jour, la forme change. Désormais, un livre peut, en soi, être plus ou moins réussi, plus ou moins achevé, comme on dit. L'important est que son architecture particulière prenne place dans l'architecture globale.[102]

[From 1832 onward, Balzac moved from writing novels to writing an œuvre, and the moment the idea of conceiving a whole took root, the form changed. Now, one book could be more or less successful in and of itself, more or less complete, as they say. The important thing was for that individual piece of architecture to take its place in the overall structure.]

La seule façon est de faire de la mosaïque. Chaque élément doit être fait pour s'intégrer dans une composition globale. On ne connaît jamais la forme définitive de la mosaïque. On la découvre peu à peu.

En toute modestie, c'est ma démarche. J'ai horreur des grands machins et des grandes foules. [...] Je me sens plus doué pour la précision du dessin, une méticulosité. J'essaie de rendre du petit, de l'infime, significatif, exemplaire. Il n'est pas indispensable que chacun de mes films soit considéré comme parfait. [...] Ce que je cherche c'est que l'ensemble de mes réalisations donne une idée très précise d'une vision des choses.[103]

[The only way is to create a mosaic. Each element must be made to fit into an overall composition. You never know the final form of the mosaic; you discover it, bit by bit.

In all modesty, that is my approach. I hate big machines and big crowds. […] I feel like I have more of a talent for the precision of drawing; that meticulousness. I try to make the small and the miniscule feel significant and exemplary. It’s not necessary for each

> one of my films to be considered perfect. […] What I want is for all of my work as a whole to give a very precise idea of a vision of things.]

In *Le Boucher* (1969), the primary-school teacher offers her students a condensed version of this Balzacian approach: '[Balzac] a essayé de composer son œuvre comme un tout pour en faire la peinture de la société de son époque' ['Balzac tried to compose his work as a whole in such a way as to create a picture of the society of his era']. This is a veritable *mise en abyme*, or metatextual commentary, seemingly placed here by the director via the intermediary of his muse (Stéphane Audran): indeed, this aesthetic is beloved by Chabrol, who also seeks to analyse the society of his era, from provincial mores (*Le Beau Serge*, *Le Boucher*) to family (*Les Liens du sang*, *La Fleur du mal*), women (*Les Bonnes Femmes*, *La Femme infidèle*, *Violette Nozière*, *Betty*, etc.), and marriage (*La Femme infidèle*, *Juste avant la nuit*, and *Une partie de plaisir*).

The Balzac-Chabrol link is further reinforced by the fact that, in *Le Boucher*, the teacher is implicitly compared to the Balzacian character of Hélène. Mademoiselle Hélène in effect dictates to her students an extract from Chapter 5 of *La Femme de trente ans*, which describes the moment of reunion between the character of Hélène, who has married a privateer, with her father, a marquis. Several things encourage us to see this passage as an important *mise en abyme* of the Chabrolean character of Hélène and her desires :[104] firstly the title (for viewers who will have identified Balzac's novel, since it is not mentioned explicitly in the film), *Une Femme de trente ans*, refers back to the teacher, since this is her approximate age. In terms of the editing, the parallel between the reading of the passage (with the door opening and the appearance of Popaul the butcher at the window is emphasized. Note as well the laughter of the children, which emphasizes the fact that the first name of Balzac's heroine is the same as that of the teacher. Finally, the last line of the dictation –

'l'âme la plus grossière devait être impressionnée' ['even the coarsest soul had to be impressed'] – functions as a clear reference to Popaul, an unsophisticated character (and serial killer) who offers Hélène a leg of lamb in parody of a bouquet of flowers. We also see Popaul disguised as a marquis, at Mademoiselle Hélène's request, at the school festival. *La Femme de trente ans* shines a new light on the character of Hélène: contrary to what her refusal to allow herself to be wooed might suggest, is it possible that the teacher is hoping to transform Popaul, 'that coarse soul', into a romantic hero? Could Popaul the pirat, the boor, be transformed into a loving husband and father like that of Balzac's Hélène? The failure of this profess is declared in prolepsis by Popaul's crude jokes and the masquerade during the costume party (the gauche Popaul is utterly unsuited to play a marquis). In brief, Chabrol insinuates, a stable relationship between the two characters, a relationship normalised by social codes (marriage), is impossible. Thus, in *Le Boucher*, Chabrol uses Balzacian intertext both at the diegetic level (as a subtle indicator of the impossibility of a union between the teacher Hélène and the butcher Popaul) and, in an equally subtle and allusive way, as an unequivocal statement of his own mosaic filmic aesthetic.

*Les Cousins* (1958) is also profoundly marked by a Balzacian intertext. It shows clear parallels with *Les Illusions perdues* and *Le Père Goriot*, links reinforced by the direct mention of these novels in the film.[105] Like Rastignac, Charles, a serious young man devoted to his mother, arrives in the city from the provinces to study law. He stays with his cousin Paul, a cynical dandy and partygoer who does not hesitate to destroy the burgeoning love between Charles and Florence by seducing the latter. Charles makes the acquaintance of a bookseller, who gives him a copy of *Les Illusions perdues*, complaining that young people no longer read Balzac and claiming that one student 'lui a presque jeté *Le Père Goriot* à la figure' ['all but threw *Le Père Goriot* in his face'].[106] Completely disenchanted with student life and the cynical atmosphere of the 1950ies, Charles decides to dedicate himself

exclusively to his studies – but, as we saw earlier, in a cruel twist of irony, he fails where his cousin Paul succeeds without making any real effort. Charles is confronted with the hard reality of Parisian life but, unlike his Balzacian counterparts, and perhaps because he has failed fully to take on board the lesson of Balzac (he has decided to give *Les Illusions perdues* back to the bookseller), Charles loses his life following a tragic series of circumstances. It is much more difficult here for the viewer to identify himself with Charles or Paul than for readers of Balzac to identify with Rastignac.[107] *Les Cousins* is in many ways a very loose adaptation or a detached and cynical rewriting of *Les Illusions perdues*.

Aside from the Balzacian intertexts we have just seen, which are contained in the narratives themselves and are more or less obvious, there are striking similarities in terms of the construction of characters. Balzac specialists have demonstrated his various procedures of 'complexification' of the 'personnage saillant' ['salient character'].[108] The term 'figures saillantes' ['salient figures'], used by Balzac himself in his foreword to *La Comédie humaine*,[109] refers to a prominent character or protagonist. Far from being static and immutable social stereotypes, these salient characters are characterised, on the contrary, by their 'modernity' and their multiple facets, which turn them into complex symbols that are sometimes difficult to read. This 'effet de tremblé de sens' ['blurred meaning effect'] or opacity, which produces a 'personnage-mystère' ['mystery-character'] (that is, a character who is a cipher),[110] is completely typical of Chabrol's filmic style.

Chabrol appropriates and distorts another Balzacian strategy in an even more blatant manner: the recurrence of characters. This process, which lies at the heart of *La Comédie humaine* and is in many ways Balzac's signature, has the effect of complexifying both characters (by offering a fragmented image of them) and the reading contract (the key role accorded to the reader's memory) – a narrative innovation that was by no means universally acclaimed in the 19th century, being far too modern and confusing.

However, this 'architectural' strategy is developed in a markedly different fashion by Chabrol. Certainly the characters of Charles, Paul, and Hélène form a recurring trio in Chabrol's œuvre (*La Femme infidèle, Que la bête meure, Le Boucher, Juste avant la nuit, La Rupture,* and *La Décade prodigieuse*), with Charles and Paul often being rivals for Hélène's affections. The character of Charles may be seen as an ironic portrayal of the young Chabrol, innocent and repressed, while the cynical, charismatic, and provocative Paul calls to mind the writer and scenarist of multiple Chabrol films, Paul Gégauff.[111] In the case of Hélène in particular, the recurrence is also emphasized by the fact that the role is played by the same actress (Stéphane Audran).[112] The crucial difference, though, lies in the fact that these homonymous characters are, diegetically speaking, completely separate from one another. Thus Hélène/Stéphane Audran is a village schoolteacher in *Le Boucher*, a rich bourgeois Versailles-dweller in *La Femme infidèle* (1968), and a young mother with modest origins in *La Rupture* (1970), with a personality that changes drastically from one film to the next. None of the characters remain the same in any two films. The recurrence of first names (and actors) thus functions at a much more symbolic level for Chabrol than it does for Balzac. It encourages reflection on the part of the viewers and pushes them to approach the *œuvre* overall rather than each film individually: why this recurrence of names? What are the commonalities between the characters with the same names? How do they fit into the Chabrolean mosaic? A strange system of echoes (or false echoes) is thus created at the core of the Chabrolean oeuvre, with the contradictory effect of both fragmenting and unifying it.[113]

Even more than in the work of Balzac, where the circulation of a fictional cast occurs from one book to the next, this true/false recurrence reinforces the complexity of Chabrol's characters and the worlds he creates, while at the same time emphasizing the universal

applicability of certain human elements. Chabrol thus urges us to 'read' his work as a whole, but the mosaic he creates only becomes, paradoxically, more mysterious and fragmented.

It would be interesting to explore just how far this recurrence of names contributes to a *mythic* dimension of the Chabrolean universe (note, for that matter, the obvious recourse to myth in Chabrol – *Que la bête meure*, *La Décade prodigieuse*, and *La Rupture*, with its epigraph drawn from *Phaedra*, which may also hark back, as we know, to a Balzacian aesthetic), as it does to the Balzacian one.[114] So, it is certainly not insignificant that, of all Balzac's novels, Chabrol attempted to adapt *La Peau de chagrin*, a text that flirts openly with the fantastic and the mythical. During an interview with Chabrol for *Sight and Sound*, David Overbey, having emphasized the Balzacian quality of his films, asked the director why he had never adapted a novel by Balzac.[115] To which Chabrol replied: 'One can't transpose Balzac's time. I broke my back trying to transpose *La Peau de chagrin* to a modern setting, but I couldn't find a way'.[116] But as we will see, this is perhaps not quite true insofar as, in many respects, *Alice ou la dernière fugue* (1977) resembles *La Peau de chagrin*.

The choice of *La Peau de chagrin* is only surprising at first – that is, if we consider Chabrol, narrowly and reductively, as the director of the provincial bourgeoisie (in which case *Le Père Goriot* or *Eugénie Grandet* would have seemed more obvious choices) –, but it begins to make sense when we look at the Chabrolean mosaic in all its complexity. Chabrol, like Balzac, 'is too big for the frame', so to say, the Realist frame in particular. He never limited himself to a single genre or perspective; he explored the facets of human nature through detective films, melodrama, comedy, documentary, and often a mixture of different genres. He, too, was tempted by the fantastic and the bizarre : see *Alice ou la dernière fugue*, in which Alice (played by Sylvia Krystel), staying in a strange and idyllic dwelling following an unexplained car accident, tries in vain to escape this parallel universe. Illusion and reality

mingle, and characters lose in density what they gain in oneirism. *Alice ou la dernière fugue*, a film that is all but forgotten today, is a fantastical and allegorical tale in which we can sense the influences of Fritz Lang (to whom the film, with its expressionist staging, is dedicated), Lewis Carroll (the heroine is given the first name 'Alice' and the last name 'Carroll'), and Borgès (Alice is seen reading *Fictions*). But there is also an indirect homage to *La Peau de chagrin* in the film. Just after Alice's car crashes into an unidentified object (which we discover at the end of the movie to have been a tree), she uses a mysterious, silky yellow cloth to break the windscreen – a sort of Chabrolean *peau de chagrin* that seems to represent the key or entry of Alice into a parallel universe. Whether a talisman or an anti-talisman, the yellow cloth does seem to function in the same way as Raphaël's *peau de chagrin* in the sense that it evokes the speedy passage of time and the inexorableness of death. Indeed, Alice's life will shrink inexorably until the final announcement of her death. We are led to understand that the yellow cloth marks the origin point of this area of temporal distortion or time warp, which allows Alice to escape momentarily from a death that was undoubtedly instantaneous, as the final shots of the film suggest.

More generally, and in a manner more diffuse and indirect than in *Alice ou la dernière fugue*, one might say that Chabrol, like Balzac, 'transforms contemporary material into myth'.[117] Often without sacrificing the realism of social representation of the middle class of his time, Chabrol examines the 'myth', in the sense that he portrays universal attributes, 'beings that incarnate in a symbolic form forces of nature and aspects of the human conditions'.[118] Balzac, as Laubriet emphasizes, portrays 'passions, ambitions, and ideas. […] What we see are not specific men and women, but Vanity, Power, Family, Revolt, Usury […], and so many other beings from the abstract world, which are, in the eyes of Balzac, real beings that fight against one another through humans, guiding their marionettes to this or that end'.[119] The same is true for Chabrol, who relentlessly portrays Infidelity (*La Femme*

*infidèle*) ; Monstrousness (*Le Boucher*, *Que la Bête meure*, *Merci pour le chocolat*); Power (*L'Ivresse du pouvoir*), Family (*Les Liens du sang*, *Une partie de plaisir*, *La Fleur du mal*), and Vengeance (*Que la bête meure*).

So, it is both Balzac as the analyst of the social reality of his time, and Balzac as the creator of universal human situations and attributes or 'myths', that we find in Chabrol. In the pragmatic aspects of their creation, Balzac and Chabrol also show numerous similarities. Far from a romantic and idealised vision of a work of art and of the profession of writer/director free from all material considerations, both are, on the contrary, highly conscious of the necessity of creating their work in a way that suits the conditions of production. And this extremely realistic approach, taken by both Balzac and Chabrol, informs and even guides their aesthetic. In the case of Balzac, of course, this was a truly modern and innovative way of working that earned him a great many attacks from his contemporaries. We know that Sainte-Beuve viciously criticized the architecture of *La Comédie humaine*, a work constructed over multiple novels, which he dismissed from 1838-39 onward as 'littérature industrielle' ['industrial literature'].[120] For Claire Barel-Moisan, 'par ses engagements dans le monde éditorial, par l'évolution de sa carrière et de sa réception, Balzac constitue un exemple particulièrement complexe des tensions entre le champ de la production culturelle avec toutes ses exigences économiques, et la défense d'une certaine conception de l'art' ['through his undertakings in the publishing world, and through the evolution of his career and reception, Balzac constitutes a particularly complex example of the tensions between the field of cultural production with all its economic demands, and the defence of a certain conception of art'].[121] The invention of the system of recurring characters is particularly worthy of placement in this context; if Balzac invented this system, or subterfuge, in 1834, it was in large part because he believed that in this way he could guarantee his creditors' trust[122]. The

pragmatic approach of Chabrol, artisan and architect, is a modern counterpart to Balzac's 'industrial literature',[123] and in Chabrol we also find productions made to 'pay the bills' (*Le Tigre aime la chair fraiche* [1964], *Le Tigre se parfume à la dynamite* [1965]).

Although, from a thematic point of view, Chabrol puts a more obvious emphasis than does Balzac on human frailty (incest, voyeurism, madness, sexual perversions and impulses) – thus offering a very personal and troubled view of humanity –, the shadow of Balzac hangs over the director's filmic output. Certainly, the Balzacian fingerprint is much more direct and obvious in Chabrol's earlier films (those from the 1950s and 60s), and the last film using recurring characters (the trio of Paul, Charles, and Hélène) is *La Décade prodigieuse* in 1971 (although one could easily argue that the three characters of Paul, Jacques and Françoise in *Bellamy* [2009] work in a similar way). But, even if he seems to have moved away gradually from the reuse of characters and Balzacian intertext or citation, his approach to his work as a mosaic remained no less valid at the end of Chabrol's career. Up to his final film (*Bellamy*), Chabrol constructed a complex œuvre, broad and multifaceted, systematically exploring the darkness of humanity, the artificiality of social norms and codes, and the ever-more blurred boundary between illusion and reality. And a Balzacian reading of Chabrol is particulalrly fruitful insofar as it encourages us to view his production as a whole, rather than reducing it to a few masterpieces (*Le Boucher*, *La Femme infidèle*, *La Cérémonie*) lost amid a motley and uneven output. Chabrol's unique perspective gains in complexity, immediacy, and depth once we accept this varied nature as an integral part of his Balzacian, mosaical aesthetic.

As we can see, Chabrol's cinema is marked by an array of influences, essentially filmic or literary – some being more profound and visible than others –, with Balzac reigning as an overarching figure over his œuvre. Of course, there are many more. Through the next chapters, the names of Magritte, Philip K. Dick and Kubrick will for instance crop up, in no

particular order. Extraordinarily well-read and cultured, Chabrol drew on a very wide range of artistic sources, picking up what he needed in order to construct his own aesthetic. As for Chabrol's direct influence and legacy on other directors, and the increasing use of the adjective 'chabrolien' ['Chabrolean'] as a generic marker in the reviews of a certain type of French thriller, they will be examined at the end of the following chapter on Chabrol and genres.

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[1] In fact, he claimed full responsibility for this approach in his autobiographical volume, *Et pourtant je tourne...*

[2] Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 159: 'Le défi me tente, me donne un doux vertige, comme un précipice. J'accepte'.

[3] See the documentary *Claude Chabrol l'artisan* (2003) by Patrick Le Gall.

[4] Delorme, 'Chabrol méconnu', p. 5.

[5] *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* [Spécial Chabrol], 660, p. 27.

[6] Narboni, *Violette Nozière*, pp. 38-40

[7] Rauger, 'Claude Chabrol, cinéaste anti-naturaliste', p. 184. A version of this article was reproduced under the title, 'Les fantômes du cinéaste', in *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, numéro spécial Chabrol, October 1997, pp. 82-85.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 185.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 188.

[10] Rauger, 'Un autre monde', pp. 10-11.

[11] Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne...*, p. 135.

[12] Thomasson, 'Claude Chabrol, l'enfant libre' [documentary].

[13] 'Les 50 ans de la Nouvelle Vague' [documentary].

[14] Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 136.

[15] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, p. 126.

[16] Far from the anti-studio dogmatism of his Nouvelle Vague friends, Chabrol, however, made *Les Cousins* in a studio (as well as *A double tour* and *Landru*), thereby proving his flexibility and pragmatic approach to film-making. See Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 40.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

[18]*Ibid*., p. 125.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 125.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 127 and p. 125.

[22] Having divorced from his wife Agnès, Chabrol's production company went belly up after *Les Cousins* was released.

[23] See Braucourt, *Claude Chabrol*, pp. 112-113 and Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 17.

[24] Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 136.

[25] Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 34.

[26] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 14.

[27] Chabrol, 'La peau, l'air et le subconscient', p. 24.

[28] See Hayward, *Cinema Studies*, p. 203 [entry: 'Italian neo-realism'].

[29] Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 141.

[30] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, p. 135.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 136.

[32] There are numerous references to firewood and/or gathering wood in the Bible, including the story of the wood gatherer who was killed by God for violating the terms of Sabbath (*Exodus*, 31:14).

[33] See Austin, p. 19.

[34] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 572, p. 370.

[35] Pascal, p. 37.

[36] The Fascist label that will be given by some critics to *Les Bonnes Femmes* a year later can, to a large extent, be traced back to *Les Cousins*' portrayal of right-wing students in 1950ies Paris.

[37] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, p. 143.

[38] See the section on Chabrol and Balzac in this chapter.

[39] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, p. 144.

[40] *Ibid*., p. 147.

[41] See Bergala, ‘Le plan-aquarium’, p. 153.

[42] *Ibid*., p. 155.

**[43] Pagination.**

[44] Fassbinder, ‘Insects in a Glass Case’, pp. 205-206 et p. 252.

[45] *Ibid*., p. 205.

[46] And in *Le Beau Serge*, Marie (Bernadette Lafont) tells François (Chabrol’s alter ego): ‘C’est bizarre, tu as l’air de nous observer comme si on était des insectes’.

[47] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 86.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

[49] Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 152.

[50] See Turim, *Flashbacks in Film*.

[51] Such time warps will be used again by Chabrol, in *Alice ou la dernière fugue* for instance.

[52] To the dismay of his producers, the Hakim brothers, who famously told Chabrol [about Belmondo]: ‘Comment voulez-vous qu’on veuille bien filmer quelqu’un d’aussi moche!’ [‘How could anyone be willing to film someone so ugly!’]. See Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 45.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

[54] As we shall see, in *La Demoiselle d’honneur* (2004) dolls will also be used to convey a sense of uncanny and reinforce the ‘Gothic’ dimension of the film.

[55] See Chapter V on Chabrolean spaces as heterotopias of crisis, which draws on Foucault's concept of heterotopia or 'other space'.

[56] The concept was originally coined by a Robotics Professor, Masahiro Mori, in 1970. Since then, it attracted considerable interest in popular culture. See 'The Uncanny Valley', pp. 98-100. Gianpiera Conti uses the concept to analyse the function of dolls in Mario Bava's films in her PhD thesis entitled 'Interacting with Horror'.

[57] Freud, 'The Uncanny'.

[58] Royle, *The uncanny*, p. 2.

[59] Sencindiver, 'The Doll's Uncanny Soul', p. 103.

[60] **Pagination.**

[61] Belmondo will even comment on the characters' unnatural stillness : 'Qu'est-ce qui se passe ? On entendrait une mouche voler' ['What's going on ? One could hear a fly'].

[62] See Chapter 6, in particular the section on the Chabrolean house of puppets and Renoir's influence. [**pagination**]

[63] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 88.

[64] Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 48.

[65] As Bernadette Lafont recalled in Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 172. As we shall see, the influence is reciprocal and Chabrol drew on Kubrick's *2001 A Space Odyssey* for *Le Boucher*.

[66] See the parallel with Agnès Varda's *Le Bonheur* (1964). Audiences did not get the second-degree narrative and visual irony, and both films were thoroughly misunderstood. See

Catherine Dousteyssier-Khoze, '*Mise en abyme*, irony and visual cliché in Agnès Varda's *Le Bonheur* (1964)'.

[67] The *mise en scène* seems to point to that, for instance in the zoo scene where the women are seen through the bars of a cage, thereby reminding the viewer that the shop in which they work (and by extension the society in which they live) also function(s) as a cage/ prison. Whatever these uneducated working-class women do, they do not stand a chance. Chabrol went as far as to say that his was 'un film profondément marxiste' ['a deeply Marxist film']. See Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 28.

[68] Letter to Louise Colet, 16 January 1852.

[69] Magny, 'Des huées et des coupes', p. 68.

[70] See Paule Sengissen's comments in *Radio-Télévision-Cinéma:* Les camps de concentration ont déjà été une fois possibles à cause de notre passivité. Aujourd'hui, continuer à développer la passivité du public, miser sur son goût de destruction, c'est de propos délibéré préparer un nouvel univers concentrationnaire... On me dira que la mise en scène de Chabrol est éblouissante. Durant la guerre, bien des gens regardaient les soldats SS et disaient: 'ils sont si bien habillés, si bien disciplinés, si polis' (Magny, 'Des huées et des coupes', p. 69).

[71] ['Le naturalisme sans humanisme de Claude Chabrol choque la critique et le public']. See Magny, 'Vingt minutes de la vie de Chabrol', p. 67.

[72] Bitsch, 'Charles Bitsch raconte la restauration des *Bonnes Femmes*', pp. 70-73.

[73] Magny, 'Vingt minutes de la vie de Chabrol', p. 69.

[74] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 25.

[75] Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 153.

[76] Hayward, *Cinema Studies, The Key* Concepts, p. 441. (Entry: 'thriller/psychological thriller').

[77] Bergala, 'Le plan-aquarium', p. 155.

[78] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 28.

[79] *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

[80] The recurrent shots on the scintillating disco ball – that remind the close-ups on the lights during Ginette (Stéphane Audran)'s show – also acquire a reflexive quality. They reflect the multiple facets of the overall narrative.

[81] See in particular Austin, *Claude Chabrol*.

[82] Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 121.

[83] Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 204.

[84] This visual metaphor is of course also a reference to the source novel for *Merci le chocolat*, *The Chocolate Cobweb* (1948) by Charlotte Armstrong. See Leigh, 'Cause and Effect in Claude Chabrol's *Merci pour le chocolat*.

[85] The zoo shot in which the women from *Les Bonnes Femmes* are filmed as if behind the animals' cage works in a very similar way.

[86] Bergala, 'Le plan-aquarium', p. 153.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. 153.

[88] Chabrol, 'Hitchcock devant le mal', p. 42.

[89] *Ibid*., p. 44.

[90] Chabrol, *Laissez-moi rire* !, pp. 40-41.

[91] Pagination.

[92] See de Baecque, 'Gégauff, le premier des Paul', pp. 88-91.

[93] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 7.

[94] *Ibid.*,p. 7.

[95] This section is based on my article entitled 'Chabrol à la lumière de Balzac'. I would like to thank Classiques Garnier for the permission to reproduce parts of this article and Tina Kover for translating this section.

[96] See for instance, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 'Adieu Claude Chabrol' [press review], 13/09/10.

[97] Fassbinder, 'Insects in a Glass Case', p. 205.

[98] Baron, *Romans français du XIXe siècle à l'écran*, p. 46.

[99] Michel, 'A propos du pessimisme balzacien: nature et société', p.14. Translated by Tina Kover.

[100] See Bell, 'Cavemen Among Us', pp. 39-52.

[101] Balzac, *Une fille d'Ève*, p. 265.

[102] Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 346.

[103] *Ibid.*, p. 347.

[104] See Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, pp. 65-66.

[105] See Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, pp. 21-22 and Kline, *Screening the Text* [Chapter 4: 'In the Labyrinth of Illusions: Chabrol's Mirrored Films'], pp. 87-117.

[106] One can also be reminded of *Le Père Goriot* when watching *La Rupture* (1970): in *Claude Chabrol*, Austin states that 'the guesthouse is reminiscent of the pension Vauquer […] and certain echoes of Balzac's melodramatic novel can be found in *La Rupture*', p. 71.

[107] See Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*: 'While Balzac allowed readers to identify with and mourn the decline of the optimist Rastignac, Chabrol prsents the audience with two lead characters, neither of whom warrants its allegiances', p. 145.

[108] See Ebguy, 'Un « souvenir dans l'âme »', p. 16.

[109] Balzac, 'Avant-propos de *La Comédie humaine*', p. 18.

[110] Ebguy, 'Un « souvenir dans l'âme »', p. 13.

[111] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 7.

[112] With the exception of *Que la bête meure*, in which the role of Hélène is played by Caroline Cellier.

[113] Another resonance of note in Chabrol's work is the fact that the recurrence of characters corresponds sometimes (but not always) to the recurrence of actors and actresses (in particular Audran and Huppert). This is a different strategy on Chabrol's part, one of weaving connections in order to create a system of echos between different films and thus to favour the sense of a whole, of the arrangement of the various pieces of the puzzle.

[114] See for instance Laubriet, *L'intelligence de l'art chez Balzac*.

[115] Overbey, 'Chabrol : Game of Mirrors', pp. 78-81 and p. 99.

[116] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

[117] Laubriet, *L'intelligence de l'art chez Balzac*, p. 57.

[118] See the definition provided by *Le Robert* dictionary.

[119] Laubriet, *L'intelligence de l'art chez Balzac*, p. 57. Translated by Tina Kover.

[120] Sainte-Beuve published his famous article 'De la littérature industrielle' in *La Revue des deux mondes* in September 1839.

[121] Barel-Moisan, 'Révolution éditoriale ou « charlatanisme de spéculateur »?', p. 31.

[122] See Péraud, 'La mise en texte balzacienne du crédit', pp. 224-225.

[123] See for instance Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 11.

## Chapter 2: Chabrol and genres

Generically speaking, Chabrol's output is remarkably diverse: he has filmed farce, melodrama, fantasy, war films, spy films, literary adaptations (*Madame Bovary*) and even a documentary on WW2 propaganda (*L'Œil de Vichy/The Eye of Vichy*).[1] But his name remains mostly associated with the crime thriller (and to a lesser degree with the melodrama), or, more specifically, with what one might call the bourgeois thriller, where murders occur within the claustrophobic confines of the bourgeois family, and/or provincial town.

Since the 1960s, film theory has been looking at genre as a key critical concept, not merely as a means of classification but also by taking into account modes of production, spectator expectation, critical reception, that is the various types of constructs and discourses that shape 'genericness'.[2] There is still a general assumption that the ratio of a film's *auteurship* is inversely proportional to a film's genericness, that is to its generic composition. As Raphaëlle Moine pointed out in *Les Genres du cinéma* (2005), critics are generally interested in showing how an *auteur*'s film subverts, parodies and/or goes beyond a genre.[3] In this chapter I shall try to reconcile the 'paradox' by showing how Chabrol often works within the confines of a genre (the thriller) while remaining an *auteur* and retaining a distinctive voice (*Le Boucher*). But more reflexive and 'slippery' films will also be focused on, in which the concept of genre itself becomes problematized within the narrative (*Masques*; *La Fille coupée en deux* and *Bellamy*).

In many respects, Chabrol created the modern French thriller. We shall see at the end of this chapter that the adjective 'chabrolien' is widely used in relation to contemporary films, thereby sealing his lasting legacy on the psychological thriller. However, when defining and

discussing the meaning of the French thriller, film specialists often choose to focus on the influence of America and/or film noir and end up categorising it as a vehicle for the discussion of the processes of modernisation or urbanisation.[4] Even though many of Chabrol's films can be interpreted as stories of desire and betrayal, and retain the moral ambiguity of the film noir, the direct influence of American models is questionable, and in any case much less significant than for Godard and Truffaut. And quite significantly, because he does not fit the mould, his films are rarely mentioned in surveys or anthologies of French Cinema and the French thriller genre. For Chabrol, the thriller is ultimately the main/favoured genre and it is a fitting metaphor for his whole *œuvre*, in that he himself conducts a thorough investigation into what being human means.

**Genre as an alibi**

Chabrol famously said about the polar or crime thriller, 'c'est le genre qui emmerde le moins le public' ['it's the least boring genre for the audience'].[5] Thus, genre becomes a sort of alibi for him, a convenient disguise or mask − the title of one of his films − which allows him to come back again and again to his favourite motives, obsessions and taboos: incest; madness; voyeurism; the figure of the monster; the complexities of (sexual) relationships between men and women, of society, of morals. His exploration of human impulses and drives leads him to question and subvert social constructs. But an important distinction needs to be made: rather than openly subverting the genre(s), which he does sparingly, Chabrol subverts *within* the genre(s), that is within a well-tested structure. A parallel could be made here with poetry, whether it be Baudelaire's love for the alexandrine or, more recently, Houellebecq's poet/narrator in *Rester vivant*: 'Croyez à la structure. Croyez aux métriques anciennes, également. La versification est un puissant outil de libération de la vie intérieure'.[6] That is

precisely what genre is for Chabrol, rather than a constraint, it is ‘a powerful tool for the liberation of inner life’ or, more precisely, for the exploration of the complexity of human life.

The two predominant genres are the thriller and the melodrama. The first is a vehicle for exploring the themes of madness and voyeurism while he borrows from the second one the focus on the family and moral values, the emphasis on the female character and, sometimes indeed, on class conflicts and concerns. Laura Mulvey’s distinction between the masculine melodrama and its function of reconciliation and the female melodrama[7] and its function of excess and unresolved contradictions could be usefully explored (Chabrol’s films clearly borrow more from the latter category) in this respect but the thriller will remain the centre of our focus.

Some films remain however difficult to categorise. Their overtly theatrical and self-reflexive dimensions (such as where characters are 'overacting' or brutal shifts in generic conventions) are a sign of and contribute to their generic instability. They sometimes verge on parody or self-parody; 'second degree' effects and mystification prevail, thereby giving rise to an elaborate game of cat and mouse with the audience and encouraging a problematising of the works' reception. *Masques* and *La Fille coupée en deux* are excellent examples of this. Arguably, such overtly playful films encourages the audience to 'reread' Chabrol's *œuvre* as a whole − especially the more 'stable' films − and to look out for clues or cracks when images and generic identities fragment.

We shall focus here on a few examples of what Chabrol does to/with genres, how he works broadly within the confines of a generic frame while managing to refract or reflect it. The first one, *Le Boucher*, is a generically stable psychological thriller in that, as in the films of Hitchcock’s for example, it ‘create[s] fear and apprehension in the audience’.[8] At least,

that is true until the end (classroom confession), when *Le Boucher* transcends the thriller genre and becomes overtly allegorical by providing a philosophical investigation into civilisation, atavism and the human. The other films examined in this chapter, *Masques*, *La Fille coupée en deux* and *Bellamy* are more similar in that they all resort, in various degrees, to reflexive modes: parody (of the fairy-tale in *Masques*; of the Simenon-type polar in *Bellamy*) and widespread reflexivity and theatricality (in *La Fille coupée en deux*) are strategies that allow Chabrol to challenge the viewer's expectations whilst pursuing his in-depth exploration of human darkness and the complexity of human relationships.

## *Le Boucher* : A Human Odyssey

As we have seen − and we were able to trace this back to Balzac −, there is often a tension in Chabrol's films between, on the one hand, the accurate representation of 'reality' (whether it be social, psychological, geographical, temporal) and an engagement with what can broadly be called the realm of the Symbolic.[9] This symbolic order often appears, although not exclusively, in the guise of a mythic (or fantastic) imagination. Such negotiations between Realism and Symbolism, which do not necessarily follow generic classification, can vary widely both in terms of 'dosage' and quality. Some films fall into the category of the Symbolic (with more − *Que la bête meure* − or less success − *La Décade prodigieuse*; *Alice ou la dernière fugue*) whilst others mostly encourage a realistic reading grid, as is the case with many key thrillers such as *Le Boucher* or *La Cérémonie*. However, even the most 'realistic' films sometimes 'flicker' and venture into the realm of the symbolic, and with a bit of caution, one could venture that this is a winning combination for Chabrol. Such films are both gripping, immediately accessible to a wide public and multilayered, dense, open to interpretation. *Le Boucher*, which is one of Chabrol's most famous films and, in our view, his

masterpiece, is an excellent example of this. Even though it remains firmly anchored both within a realistic setting and the thriller genre, a slippage seems to occur at the end of *Le Boucher*, adding to the overall complexity and ambivalence of the film.

In his usual offhand manner, Chabrol did not give away the multilayered complexity of the film when he talked about *Le Boucher* in the autobiographical *Et pourtant je tourne* and his casual summary certainly does not do justice to the film:

> *Le Boucher* est né de plusieurs projets que je traînais. Je voulais faire un film sur un tueur de village, un autre sur les instituteurs. J'avais envie de tourner à nouveau avec Jean Yanne, avec Stéphane [Audran]... Tout cela s'est mélangé et a donné un résultat que je crois bon.[10]
>
> [*Le Boucher* was born out of a few random projects. I wanted to make a film about a village killer, and another one about school teachers. I felt like making another film with Jean Yanne, and Stéphane [Audran]… All this got mixed together and produced a result which I think is good.]

In the memoirs compiled shortly before his death, Chabrol however admitted to the very ambitious scope of the film by stating that *Le Boucher* was meant to be 'l'histoire de l'humanité depuis l'homme de Cro-Magnon jusqu'à nos jours' ['the history of mankind from the Cro-Magno era until the present day'].[11] Made in 1969, just after *Que la bête meure*, and right in the middle of the so-called 'Hélène cycle',[12] *Le Boucher* clearly placed Chabrol on an upward trajectory after the spoofs of the mid-sixties. As a very different type of made-to-order film from the *Tigre* series and other mid-1960ies films (Chabrol wrote the script by himself within a couple of months in order to please his then-wife, Stéphane Audran, who was keen to act in a film with Jean Yanne), *Le Boucher* was very well received, by critics and audience alike, both in France and internationally.

The plot centers around two characters, 'Mademoiselle Hélène', the headteacher (Stéphane Audran) and the village butcher, Popaul (Jean Yanne, who previously played with much gusto a despicable *paterfamilias* in *Que la bête meure*). The two meet at a village wedding where they strike up an unlikely and platonic friendship; shortly after, a serial killer starts targetting young women from the area. Hélène begins to suspect Popaul when she finds a lighter, identical to the one she had presented him, near the body of a victim. Popaul eventually confesses to the teacher that he is the killer before stabbing himself with a butcher's knife in the classroom. Hélène drives him at night to the hospital where he dies shortly after his arrival. The film ends on a sequence showing Hélène/Audran lost in her thoughts, at dawn, by the river outside the village.

The film benefits from amazing performances from two lead actors who are meant to embody the nature/culture binary. The mixture of kindness and gruffness which emanates from Jean Yanne's Popaul − as the pleasant and slightly clumsy butcher/ruthless killer who falls in love with the teacher − is admirably conveyed. As for Stéphane Audran's portrayal of the cool, contained and enigmatic teacher, it is arguably her finest performance. Realism prevails in most of the film but is particularly striking at the beginning where Chabrol reconstructs with quasi ethnographic precision a postwar wedding in the French provinces (Trémolat, in the Dordogne). As Guy Austin pointed out, 'the first quarter of an hour or so is a naturalistic record of a village wedding',[13] complete with local accents (bride's father's speech), banquet and dancing in that hub of village life, the *salle des fêtes*.[14] This whole section of *Le Boucher* echoes in some ways Chabrol's neorealist/naturalistic first film, *Le Beau Serge*, also filmed in a village (Sardent, in Creuse). Although less prominently than the wedding, various other rituals and landmarks of the community punctuate the film, thereby giving it a deep realistic anchoring: funeral; shopping and gossiping (at the butcher's); *Le Boucher* also provides insights into the teaching profession and the relationship teacher/pupil

(classrooms activities; marking of homework and maths problems; organisation of school play). The church bells are heard at regular intervals and the war monument or *monument aux morts* − a staple of French village life, which tells stories of death and violence, and of wars fought on behalf of the community − is shown several times.

The plot, very simple and efficient ('Langian', according to Chabrol),[15] is based much more around Hélène's slow discovery of Popaul's guilt, and her response to it (see the key role of the lighter), rather than on the identity of the killer. The film starts tipping over during the classroom scene, when Popaul confesses to being the killer and slowly moves towards Hélène with the knife. When cornered, she shuts her eyes; a fade-out follows during which the viewer is given to understand that Popaul stabbed himself. This fade-out marks the departure from the realistic and a move towards the oneiric and the symbolic: everything will become more blurry; characters and spaces do not seem to obey common sense and logic anymore. Hélène will close her eyes again in the hospital, just before hearing the news that Popaul has just died**.** One convincing interpretative grid is that we are in Hélène's 'dream'. This whole section of the film is a projection of her repressed desires: in some way, she is the one who wished Popaul dead and who is responsible for his death.[16] The very coded shot which shows Hélène dropping the knife/'murder weapon' on the floor, as if she were the guilty party, tends to support this.

The car trip to the hospital is filmed in long, fluid tracking shots which are deeply poetic and oneiric, as is the enigmatic, atonal score by Jansen. There is a hypnotic quality to this journey, during which Popaul confesses to Hélène. Everything concurs to a symbolic reading of it.[17] Popaul's cryptic references to blood which keeps running ('le sang n'arrête pas de couler' ['blood doesn't stop running']) can be interpreted as references to his crimes and to his own lethal wound but also, more allegorically, to the history of humankind. To Bachelard's *L'eau et les rêves*, Chabrol responds with a powerful imaginary of blood. Indeed,

*Le Boucher* offers a meditation on the significance, the texture (liquidity vs viscosity), the scent and colour of blood. Blood becomes the pivotal element or motif in Charbol's mythic vision of humankind; it helps piece together an underlying story/history full of violence and cruelty but also fascination with beauty, as evoked in the cave paintings[18] of the opening credits (and the class trip to the cave). Popaul is an expert in blood ('je connais ça, le sang' ['I know about blood']): his knowledge is based on his experience of war, his job as a butcher, as well as the atavistic forces which are apparently coming back from a dark human past to lead him to murder. But he is also cast as the sacrificial victim who has to be bled for the community to be saved and be able to recover.

The bleeding-to-death of the monster is reflected and emphasised in this dream-like sequence through the fluidity of the serpent-like road at night (this key notion of flux is also referenced through the representation of the fast-flowing river at the very end of the film: water has replaced blood; the purification process is taking place). Geographical/topographical markers are blurry and story-time distorted ('Ce que c'est long, ce que c'est long' ['It is so long, it is so long'] is a verse-like line uttered by Popaul).

The arrival at the hospital does nothing to clear the symbolic spell. On the contrary, 'reality' seems to tip over even further into a parallel realm where images are dominated by symbols. Spaces acquire a highly coded function. Nothing in the temple-like height, emptiness and whiteness of the hospital entrance hall suggests that the characters have reached a local provincial hospital. We have entered a Kafkaesque, liminal space; a blank, dehumanized canvas onto which any myth/story/fairy-tale can be projected. The castle-like hospital even becomes the setting for a Beauty and the Beast moment (see Hélène's kiss to Popaul).[19] As for the hospital staff, they are mostly anonymous, faceless (we only see their arms lifting Popaul onto the stretcher and parts of their white uniform) and silent, as if not to interfere in the crucial last scene between Hélène and Popaul. They do not ask Hélène any

questions about the circumstances in which the injury was inflicted, which would be somewhat unlikely in a realistic mode of representation.[20] She is allowed to remain in her 'bubble' and this paves the way for the key sequence of the film: the series of ten shots/counter-shots on the lift button and the head-on frontal close-up on Hélène's mask-like face.

Chabrol was especially keen on the close-up of the flashing lift button, as Stéphane Audran recalls: 'la petite lumière de l'ascenseur de l'hôpital [...] s'arrête soudain de clignoter au moment où le cœur de Paul s'arrête de battre... C'était une image à laquelle Claude tenait beaucoup' ['the small light of the hospital lift suddenly stops blinking when Paul's heart stops beating. This is an image that Claude was very keen on'.] .[21]

[**insert Image 5: *Le Boucher* - Hélène's face**]

[**insert Image 6: *Le Boucher* - lift button**]

Because of their symmetry and recurrence, these two shots, repeated five times each, strike the viewer as being highly significant. They seem to constitute the symbolic epitome of the film. The blinking of the lift button obviously takes on life and death connotations in that it echoes Popaul's heartbeats: the moment when it stops blinking coincides with Popaul's death. The red colour can refer to blood (in synecdochal mode, it comes to stand for blood-obsessed Popaul himself) and therefore remind sinister instances of red in the film, such as the blood drops on the tartine. But it can also be linked to the cherries or *cerises à l'eau de vie* presented by Popaul to Hélène and to the gigot (as Louise A. Dumas noticed, 'Popaul aime à offrir des choses rouges à manger' ['Popaul likes to give people red foods']).[22] These are 'red' products from nature that a hunter-gatherer /caveman like Popaul is an expert on. However, as a symbol of the neatness and efficiency of 'modern' technology, the lift button is also a

reminder that it is modern society, as a flagship of civilisation and culture, which demands the sacrifice of Popaul. The artificial red of the button has replaced and erased the natural redness which epitomised Popaul.

Through this shot/counter-shot series on Hélène's expressionless face and on the red button, Chabrol explores the experimental potential of the close-up as a technique. As Martine Beugnet points out, in a close-up of a head, 'The head stands for the whole body [...], the face is a signifier of subjecthood and individuality, and the expression is an element of a narrative logic, to be explicated by the counter-shot that provides an image of its cause or effect'.[23] This is not the case here: the narrative logic and cause-effect link between shot/counter-shot is very thin if not altogether missing.[24] Chabrol also subverts the 'terror of the close-up' that Bonitzer identifies as a key device in the horror film and the thriller.[25] In a film with so few reflexive instances, the face-to-face encounter between Hélène and the lift button becomes all the more crucial. The flashing button turns into the eye of a camera and the camera itself functions like a two-way mirror. Through this series of gazes or non-gazes/refracting gazes, Chabrol seems to invite the viewer to pause and think of the stakes of the film, and perhaps to share Hélène's responsibility and guilt as to Popaul's fate.

Hélène looks hypnotised by the button; she has momentarily turned into a puppet or a ghost: 'The close-up turns the face into a phantom and hands it over to phantoms'.[26] Hélène's face and blind gaze corresponds perfectly to what Deleuze called 'a reflexive or reflecting face' in his analysis of the close-up and 'the affection-image': 'We are before a reflexive or reflecting face as long as the features remain grouped under the domination of a thought which is fixed or terrible, but immutable and without becoming, in a way eternal'.[27] The flashing red button seems more alive than she is; it is looking at us and blinking: indeed, 'There are affects of things' according to Deleuze.[28] As he put it when analysing the close-up on an object, the button is a 'thing [that] has been treated as a face [visage] : it has been

« envisaged » or rather «  faceified » [« visagéifiée »] , and in turn it stares at us, it looks at us… even if it does not resemble a face'.[29] The button which controls the lift – that is the modern cave in which Popaul disappears − turns into an abstract art installation: although also 'red', it looks utterly alien from and the antithesis of the cave paintings displayed in the opening credits. This sequence encourages an urgent and somewhat dizzying comment on the evolutionary process in that it emphasises the unbridgeable gap between the cave man and the modern world.

There is yet another fascinating and overlooked dimension to this series of close-up shots: the red lift button does remind the iconic computer HAL's red camera eye from Kubrick's *2001 A Space Odyssey*, which was released in 1968, that is only a year before Chabrol made *Le Boucher*.

**[Insert Image 7. *2001 A Space Odyssey*]**

Whether Chabrol was having fun referencing / parodying Kubrick's film or not, the fact that this series of close-up on Hélène's face and the red lift button could easily have come from *2001 A Space Odyssey* (see the series of shots/counter-shots during the HAL/Dave's confrontation) stresses the fact that the setting and character are completely dehumanized. The lift has become a time capsule/cave taking Popaul-Cro-Magnon back to the period where he belongs. The hospital with its modern lines, huge glass windows and eerie emptiness looks like a white spaceship (see in particular the shot with a great depth of field when Hélène exits the building) and Hélène wears a dress whose orange colour reminds Dave's spacesuit in *2001 A Space Odyssey*. We could not be further away from the Perigord 'folklore' and psychological thriller *de terroir* of the beginning. Whilst Kubrick's film deals with a series of encounters between humans and extraterrestrial forces affecting human evolution, Chabrol

hints here that, in its own way, *Le Boucher* is also a human odyssey: Mademoiselle Hélène, society's embodiment of education and culture, has had a bruising encounter with an apparently obsolete relic from Cro-Magnon times.[30] *Le Boucher* is somewhat closer to science-fiction that one might think at first sight.

However, this intriguing symbolic encounter remains diffuse and subtle: the viewer is free to overlook it; the enjoyment of the film does not depend on it. Magny believes indeed that it is the realistic anchoring which accounts for the film's big success: 'Le succès non démenti du film est moins à chercher dans l'abstraction de la parabole que dans son extrême concrétisation par le respect scrupuleux d'un réalisme classique' [‘The film’s lasting success lies less in the abstraction of the parable than in its extremely concrete dimension, conveyed through a scrupulous respect for a classic type of realism’].[31] But this extra dimension or 'parable' as Magny calls it, can make the audience question what they are seeing and avoid one-dimensional answers. Beyond the murder plot/psychological thriller, there is an exploration of what civilisation means,[32] how it is constructed, at what cost(s), and how it relates to 'nature', to human instincts, impulses and to the 'sauvage' within each and everyone. This nature/culture articulation is traced back to the Cro Magnon caveman − it is of course no coincidence that the film takes place in the Dordogne area of France, generally regarded as the cradle of mankind, and in which prehistoric caves abound. But *Le Boucher* is also a film about the nature of evil, and the symbolic will linger on until the very end of the film, as we shall see in the section devoted to the 'human beast'.[33]

### *Masques*: the Ogre as TV star

With its central plot revolving around a sinister story of inheritance, disappearance and murder, *Masques* can be broadly defined as a thriller. Christian Legagneur (Philippe Noiret),

the genial host of a cheesy but highly popular TV show *Bonheur pour tous* [Happiness for All], invites a young journalist and writer, Roland Wolf (Robin Renucci), to spend a few days with him in the grand country house where he lives in the company of his ailing god-daughter, Catherine (Anne Brochet), and several devoted employees. It soons transpires that Legagneur's would-be biographer's motivation is in fact to elucidate the disappearance of his sister, a former close friend of Catherine's. Wolf slowly discovers that behind the mask of his kind, generous and amiable host, lies a dark and twisted individual who drugs his god-daughter into a state of submissiveness similar to that of the participants' and audience's of his TV show and who will stop at nothing in order to obtain Catherine's inheritance. The whole film is built around Philippe Noiret's magisterial performance that lets the viewer glimpse the extent of the main character's deceitful nature and sheer madness: see in particular the striking scene in which Legagneur/Noiret flips when he discovers that Catherine has replaced the wooden bird by a real one in the cage – a metaphor for her return to life and the threat she now poses to her bird-phobic godfather.

Although it raises serious questions (as its title indicates, the film explores the question of appearances, deception and the contrast between public face and inner life – issues of universal relevance which have, for instance, a particular resonance in post-Jimmy Saville Britain), *Masques* does not take itself seriously. It is openly playful[34] and reflexive, and through the parody of the fairy tale that underpins the whole narrative, it provides a very good example of how Chabrol experiments within the thriller genre. The description assigned by Chabrol and Rohmer to Hitchcock's *Rebecca* ('un conte de fées policier, moderne et inquiétant' ['a modern and sinister fairy-tale and thriller'])[35] fits *Masques* to perfection. Indeed, numerous diegetic clues or allusions to the fairy-tale are disseminated throughout the film: Legagneur, perhaps in an attempt to distract Wolf from the fact that he is himself the Ogre or evil stepfather of the fairy-tale makes the following comment about children: 'Ce

sont eux les ogres'. Wolf, upon entering a strange cabinet full of doll's heads and mannequins,[36] notes: 'C'est le cabinet de Barbe-Bleue!' ['This is Blue-Beard's closet'!]. Although he got his fairy-tales mixed up, that room functions indeed as a metaphor for the sinister dealings taking place at the house and, more generally, reveals the controlling nature of Legagneur's relationship with others, whether they be the guests on his TV show or Catherine: they are all puppets whose only purpose is to justify Legagneur's carefully-constructed image of kindness and accessibility; they can be manipulated, discarded or broken into pieces at any given moment.

As for Catherine, she will hint at the fact that she has had enough of playing Sleeping Beauty's part: 'Je dormais depuis trop longtemps' ['I've been sleeping for too long']. She is more than ready to 'open her eyes' (a recurring metaphor) and elope with Prince Charming (Wolf). Although idyllic, the country house or 'castle' is shown as a threatening, ambivalent space: after Wolf's game of tennis with Legagneur, a long distance shot of the property, filmed through a gate or bars, unequivocally equates it with a prison. The evil servants, faithfully carrying out Legagneur's every order, ply the 'princess' with 'poison' (drinks spiked with sleeping pills) and try to dispose of her body. And, as in a fairy tale, all is apparently well that ends well: Catherine is rescued in time by Prince Charming; both then show up at the recording of the TV programme to unmask the evil, ironically-named Legagneur who self-distructs in a mad, theatrical rant. But has Catherine really found Prince Charming in Wolf? If she had watched *Les Bonnes Femmes*, she might think again. If Wolf's name, pointing towards another reading of the fairy-tale, is to be taken as a clue, then he might just be an avatar of Legagneur who is mostly interested in Catherine's inheritance.[37]

Chabrol dabbles in the fairy tale (from *Les Bonnes Femmes* to *La Fille coupée en deux*) insofar as it allows him to introduce another reflexive lens or reading grid within the thriller or the melodrama (as mentioned, he confessed to liking nothing more than making

films/shots containing a few layers of meaning, for the viewer to unpick).[38] Beyond the widespread reference to the fairy tale, *Masques* also points towards other genres (the scene at the breaker's yard could for instance be perceived as a nod to *Goldfinger*). Reflexivity reaches a climax at the end of the film, not only through Legagneur's live over-the-top, theatrical confession but also when the film 'se mord la queue' [bites its own tail], so to say, and the viewer is left wondering who is the anonymous intradiegetic character turning off the TV (and the programme featuring Legagneur). There is an Orwellian dimension associated to television which will be further explored by Chabrol in *Dr M*. For Austin, 'In *Masques*, television is not just the seat of Legagneur's power but also an Orwellian weapon which subjugates the viewer'.[39] As a diegetic turn of the screw or a *mise-en-abyme* of the viewing process, this last shot adds another dimension to the film: the audience can start questioning the status of the characters and the 'reality' of the story that has unfolded, – a fitting way to encapsulate the thematic content of the film and a typical Chabrolean rejection of narrative closure. The cinema audience of *Masques* is encouraged to identify and reject the processes which subjugate, objectify and enslave the *Bonheur pour tous*'s TV audience.[40] The 'spectacle' has been designated as such, unmasked. As Chabrol once put it in an interview: 'J'essaie de montrer un ensemble d'illusions et de donner un grand coup de pied dedans' ['I'm trying to point to a whole set of illusions and give it a big kick'].[41] The metaphor of the mask is therefore not only diegetic (Legagneur/Noiret's story of deceit), or generic (the parody of fairy-tale hiding within the thriller, or vice-versa): through the widespread reflexivity and the exploration of different types of spectatorship (TV and cinema), it operates more extensively at a meta-narrative level in order to interrogate the 'reality' of the image.

## Generic instability and theatricalization in *La Fille coupée en deux* (2007)[42]

*La Fille coupée en deux* stands out in Chabrol's filmography in that it deconstructs generic frames and features to a degree rarely seen in his filmography (perhaps with the exception of the rather unwatchable *Le Scandale* – a film that is fragmented and reflexive to the point of absurdity) and certainly more openly than *Masques* or even *Rien ne va plus* as a faux caper movie. This generic instability will draw our attention onto the process of theatricalization that underpins the narrative and the resulting, overwhelmingly self-conscious, reflexive nature of the film – *La Fille coupée en deux* will be used again in Chapter 5 in order to explore Chabrol's 'crystal image'. In this section, we will try to unpack the generic identities of a 'film cut in two' in order to understand how Chabrol challenges the viewer and to what effect.

*La Fille coupée en deux* is based on a *fait-divers* or human interest story – as is frequently the case in Chabrol's films, see for example *Landru* [1963], *Les Noces rouges* [1973], and *Violette Nozière* [1978]) –, in this case the 1906 murder of New York architect Stanford White. The story had already been the subject of a film, Richard Fleischer's *The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing* (1955), on which Chabrol had worked during his time as a press officer for Fox. In Chabrol's version, Gabrielle de Neige (Ludivine Sagnier) is an ambitious young woman working at a local television station (where she starts out as a weathergirl before being promoted to host of her own cultural programme) who falls madly in love with the much older writer Charles Saint-Denis (François Berléand). Saint-Denis initiates her into a variety of sexual games and practices before offering her up to his 'friends' in a brothel that seems to have been lifted straight out of a Maupassant story. *La Fille coupée en deux* is in many ways a study of the links between love and perversity and in this it resembles Polanski's 1992 *Bitter Moon*. Rejected by Saint-Denis, who refuses to leave his wife for her, Gabrielle sinks into a depression and eventually marries Paul Gaudens (played by a perfectly

hysterical Benoît Magimel), the young scion of an extremely wealthy and dysfunctional family. Deeply in love with Gabrielle, 'the Gaudens boy', as he is called in the film, is obsessed with his wife's past relationship with the writer Saint-Denis, and ultimately shoots the older man to death with a revolver as Saint-Denis is preparing to give a speech during a sophisticated evening party. The film ends with a magic show during which Gabrielle is 'cut in two' by her magician uncle and then reappears intact. The final shot is a close-up of Gabrielle, smiling with ever-increasing radiance.

Chabrol's taste for mystification is on full display in *La Fille coupée en deux*. Critics were unsure as to how to approach the film, and this uncertainty is reflected in the variety of generic, often contradictory labels applied to it in the press: 'drame';[43] 'comédie';[44] 'vaudeville' and 'grand-guignol' (Schwartzbrod, 2007);[45] and even, in the words of *Télérama*, 'tragi-comédie hyperréaliste' ['ultra-realistic tragicomedy'].[46] Chabrol himself was careful to preserve this generic blurring, for example through the oxymoronic terms 'comédie dramatique' ['dramatic comedy'] and 'drame comique' ['comic drama'] found on the film's DVD cover. *La Fille coupée en deux*, a satirical and perverse fairy tale (with its recurring allusions to *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White* – Gabrielle's surname is 'de Neige' or 'Snow'– and the Marquis de Sade) pervaded by theatricality at every level, is, generically speaking, far less clear than most of Chabrol's films. 'Theatricality' refers in this case to the ideas of excess, artificiality and second degree, and reflexivity; it is a film that flaunts and lays claim in places to its own nature as spectacle, thereby placing itself in opposition to the 'impression de réalité' ['feeling of reality'][47] that is supposed to be specific to film, and in particular to the 'cinéma de la transparence' in which, according to André Bazin, the effects of discontinuity and rupture are emphasized rather than being 'masked'.[48] 'Theatricality' also implies a game being played with the viewer, who finds himself simultaneously immersed and held at a distance. Hesitation, or generic instability, acts above all in this case to highlight

and reinforce the film's process of 'dramatization' (the process by which its theatricality is constructed and disseminated). This instability then becomes one of the signs that 'something' is happening on the scale of the film as a whole.

Appearances are, in fact, misleading and unstable in *La Fille coupée en deux*. The idea of 'reality' crumbles, and all becomes 'spectacle' in a film where performance and role-playing dominate. The circular movement linking the film's beginning to its end only reinforces this tendency; the end of the film, with its blatantly theatrical magic show that finally brings the notion of magic trick to the surface but provides no 'explanation', spurs viewers to a reinterpretation of the beginning (which was also marked by the colour red). The blurry opening shots of the film show nothing but a few red flashes on a sheet from the score of Puccini's *Turandot*; next, a series of smooth forward tracking shots establishes that we are seeing a moving car filmed through a red filter. The filter, and Puccini's music, help to magnify the road and the surrounding landscape, and to detach us from the diegetic universe (a tendency reinforced by the fact that the driver remains mostly outside our field of vision), transforming it into a spectacle of its own. Though the music is diegetically justified a few moments later (when the driver, arriving at her destination, turns off a CD player), the red filter remains, mysterious and wholly gratuitous, unexplained by anything in the diegetic universe. It is tempting, therefore, to think that its function, other than the theatricalization of the diegetic world, is to establish a link with the end of the film. Another element linking the beginning and end of the movie is the fact that both are dedicated to the 'journey', both metaphorical (in Gabrielle's case) and actual (Capucine's journey in a car), of a woman, and the suffering inflicted by a man on a woman. The final shot shows a Gabrielle still fragile and convalescent following Saint-Denis's death, while the principal theme of the music from the opening credits, the aria 'In questa reggia' from the opera *Turandot*, is a woman's revenge on men (the ancestor of the princess Turandot was humiliated and killed by a prince, and

Turandot promises to avenge her by not allowing any man to possess her). Without going into a detailed textual analysis, the link between Turandot and Gabrielle, who is seduced and humiliated by Saint-Denis, is obvious but we may also discern a second link, this one between Turandot and the character of Capucine. We do not know the story of the latter, but she may be perceived as Gabrielle's mature double. In both cases, in both the beginning and the ending of the film, we have a 'staging', an indirect representation of feminine suffering. In retrospect, and after having witnessed the blaze of colours and superimpositions that mark both the magic show and the end of the film, the viewer is incited to see, in the beginning of the film, the start of the 'performance' (that is of the Chabrolean magic show).

This is the start of a process of theatricalization that is disseminated at multiple levels of the film. *La Fille coupée en deux* seems to be divided into acts. These separations are clearly defined: cuts, fades to black, ellipses, etc. These cuts have the effect of drawing attention to the filmic medium and of facilitating certain generic changes. Chabrol is far from applying here his own guiding principle according to which 'la narration doit être invisible' ['the narration should be invisible'].[49] For example, when Gabrielle, abandoned by Saint-Denis, retreats into catatonic sleep, her uncle, who is a magician by profession, wonders lightly about the possibility of a fairy tale (*Sleeping Beauty*). This is the beginning of the fairy-tale parody created by the uncle and the mother, with the latter having just telephoned Paul Gaudens in the hope that he, in the role of Prince Charming, will be able to wake up Gabrielle. The shot shows the magician uncle suddenly seated next to Gabrielle's mother, through a sort of ellipsis/wave of the camera's magic wand: he then causes a red rose to appear (we have already noted the importance of the colour red in the film as a marker of theatricality) behind her head, an indicator of the generic trick or switch to come. The next shot is a total break with this interior scene; with no real diegetic justification, and without telling us how or why Gabrielle has woken up and decided to go away with Paul Gaudens, we

see Gabrielle and Paul plunged into an exotic world (sea, sunshine, palm trees, etc.). We are flirting with cliché here, with a pseudo-romantic trip taken by a pair of lovers in an ideal world. With this ellipsis, Chabrol overtly mocks the causal relationship: through his intradiegetic double (the magician uncle), he is able to give free rein to his rights as director-conjurer. Though the metaphor of the magic wand is much less obvious (in the absence of the intermediary-character of the magician), we are reminded of the famous scene from *Le Boucher* (1970), in which Hélène (Stéphanie Audran), cornered in a recess by a Popaul (Jean Yanne) armed with a knife, closes her eyes and seems to make a wish. Here again, a fissure is created in the film that causes us to question the links between illusion and reality.[50]

The process of theatricalization is also accentuated by reflexive structures, which abound in *La Fille coupée en deux*. First and foremost, the film favours the role and gaze of various viewers, as well as different types of audience: those watching the weather report and then the cultural programme hosted by Gabrielle, and those witnessing another type of show, that is the murder of the writer Saint-Denis by Paul Gaudens (during this murder sequence, the audience is emphasized through a long subjective tracking shot. And at the end of the film, the viewers of the magic show mingle with those watching Chabrol's film, encouraging us to reflect – or even challenge – the process of reception.

For each of the televised programmes (the weather report or Gabrielle's cultural programme), greatest emphasis is placed on the backstage areas, on what happens behind the scenes. Chabrol is very specific about the way in which the 'spectacle' is constructed; a parallel could certainly be made with Renoir, particularly with the beginnings of *Nana* (1926) and *La Règle du jeu* (1939). We are present behind the scenes of the spectacle as well as at the production of the spectacle within the spectacle (a televised programme in a film). Through these recurring *mises en abyme*, Chabrol provokes reflection on the nature of the filmic 'spectacle'.

Theatricalization is also manifested through certain scenes and characters that are particularly outrageous and excessive. This is the case with Paul Gaudens, who is made into a parody of a dandy by Benoît Magimel's exaggerated portrayal. The murder scene is also as theatrical as possible, with the figure collapsing on the stage and the grandiloquent declarations of the murderer (Paul Gaudens), who resembles nothing so much as a bad actor. We get the sense that we are watching vaudeville, or a bad piece of theatre. Characters also make recurring broad references not only to fairy tales, as we have seen, but also to other genres: 'La comédie s'arrête' ['The comedy is over'] says a furious Paul Gaudens during his journey with Gabrielle. We might also mention, in passing, the strange and unhealthy 'comedy' acted out by the trio formed by Saint-Denis, his wife, and their 'friend' Capucine, as well as the minor melodrama played out by Paul's mother (Caroline Silhol, who perfectly embodies the mother-in-law, surrounded by her two irritating daughters in another sly homage to fairy tales) in her attempt to convince Gabrielle to testify on behalf of her son. That sequence constitutes a true incursion into the genre of melodrama. In summary, in *La Fille coupée en deux*, actors often seem to function ironically, and boundaries are often blurred. The film therefore incites us to reflect on the status of the actor. On another level, it may be argued that the echoes or intertextual winks – the 'games' of Gabrielle and Saint-Denis refer to *Bitter Moon* ; the shot showing Paul in his cell at the end of the film is a nod to Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) – also serve to strengthen the process of theatricalization in that they emphasize the fictional nature of the film. By initiating an intertextual game with the viewer, Chabrol derealizes the plot.

Theatricality is also introduced through a system of metaphorical mirrors and reflections (we will return to the role played by actual mirrors in Chapter 6); the motif of doubles haunts the entire film, causing 'reality' to flicker and disturbing the illusion of what is real. See, for example, the scene in which Gabrielle and her magician uncle return to their

hotel room, or ‘castle’, as he calls it. This scene constitutes a distorted reflection of the visit paid by Gabrielle and Saint-Denis to the brothel: the conversation with the receptionist (a double for Suzanne, the club’s manageress); the ascension of the staircase; the drink offered (tea instead of an alcoholic drink); Uncle Denis (Etienne Chicot) who has ‘a proposal to make’ to Gabrielle (‘pas malhonnête, j’espère?’ [‘not an indecent one, I hope?’] answers Gabrielle with a smile. This allusion harks back immediately to the proposal, that one indecent, made earlier on by Saint-Denis). In brief, the uncle-niece relationship acts as a distorting or parodic mirror for the relationship between Gabrielle and Saint-Denis. The uncle’s proposal is for Gabrielle to participate in his magic show and allow herself to be ‘cut in two’ onstage. When she entered the room in the brothel, she submitted herself to the perverse games of Saint-Denis (sleeping with his friends), a Saint-Denis who broke off his relationship with Gabrielle immediately afterward, leaving her broken, or ‘coupée en deux’. The magician-uncle, who is also the double of the director/conjurer, thus seems to act as a double for Saint-Denis (his first name is Denis, a reflection of the ironic name of Gabrielle’s lover, ‘Saint-Denis’) in a Chabrolean version of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. In *La Fille coupée en deux*, generic instability is used to derealize the diegesis and convey the idea that magic and spectacle, which are presented as the opposite of ‘reality’ (or the mirage, the distorted and distorting reflection of ‘reality’) are inseparable from it.

### ***Bellamy*: Chabrol’s last parodic riddle**

During his career, Chabrol has openly indulged in a parodic vein, as in the *Tigre* series (*Le Tigre aime la chair fraîche* and *Le Tigre se parfume à la dynamite*) and *Marie-Chantal contre le docteur Kha*, opportunistic spoofs that exploited the 1960ies craze for Bond-like spy films. Both limited in scope and dated, these made-to-order films could certainly remain lost

in oblivion without his filmography to suffer. However, they reveal a flexibility in dealing with various genres and playing intertextual games that is quite typical of Chabrol. Also openly parodic, and more interesting, is *Dr M* (1990), which functions at the same time as a tribute to Fritz Lang (through a reworking of the Dr Mabuse character), a Philip K. Dickian anti-utopia, and a parody of a Bond film (tacky baddy responsible for mass killings across the country; Bond-type girl and main character/inspector; futuristic gismo; fast-paced action; furry cat).

Although completely different in tone, *Bellamy* can also be said to contain a strong reflexive or parodic dimension. According to Odile Barski, who co-wrote the screenplay, Chabrol's last film, dedicated to the two Georges (Simenon and Brassens), is originally meant to be a 'faux Simenon' ['fake Simemon'].[51] Indeed, *Bellamy* can be described as a pseudo *policier*/thriller in which a would-be Maigret (Depardieu as Commissaire Bellamy), on holiday in Nîmes with his wife, investigates a farfetched criminal affair (nonetheless based on a true *fait divers*)[52] while dealing with the intricacies of his own family life. The film is also clearly a showcase for and tribute to Depardieu who seems to fill in every shot – as Chabrol humorously put it, 'Nous nous sommes dits: "Soyons fins, on va se farcir Depardieu"' ['We thought: "let's be clever about it, let's pull Depardieu"'].[53]

Right after the opening sequence, the realistic dimension is somewhat derealized through a series of seven extremely short postcardish shots introducing the setting: views or key landmarks from the city of Nîmes, including two shots of the famous arenas. The 'postcard effect' introduces a light, self-conscious note (a sharp transition after the close-up on the gruesome carbonised body), as if Chabrol were playfully telling the audience: 'I can't be bothered with traditional spatial shots, you get the drift, we are in Nîmes; now let's move on to the interesting bit, that is what is happening within the Bellamys' property'. And, indeed, the next shot – a pan and tracking forward revealing a louche character lurking

outside the Bellamys' entrance gate and then entering the garden –, immediately slows down the pace. But by attracting the attention onto *formal* features, these seven snapshots also contain a discrete warning: the viewers are encouraged to distance themselves from what follows and to question the 'reality' of the representation and of Chabrol's 'creation'.

The *policier* or thriller element (so unconvincing that it exhibits its parodic nature) is used as an alibi and a mirror for the family melodrama, and vice versa, in a convoluted game of reflections and doubles which doesn't seem to lead anywhere. Indeed, in *Bellamy*, every effort is made in order to tempt the audience into playing a game of riddles. In typical Chabrolean fashion (see Gabrielle de Neige in *La Fille coupée en deux* or the Lelièvre family in *La Cérémonie* for instance), the strongly coded names / puns, that more or less ironically summarise the characters' defining qualities, are clearly meant to titillate the spectator's hermeneutical talents: the would-be murderer is named Gentil and Lellet in his two roles (i.e. Mr Nice/Mr Ugly in a parody of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde); there is also a Claire Bonheur (Happiness), a Leprince, a Jacques Lebas (Bellamy's brother Jacques). The key triangular relation centres on Paul Bellamy, his wife Françoise (Marie Bunel) and Jacques Lebas (his half brother, interpreted by Clovis Cornillac), in an echo of the old Charles/Paul/Hélène trio. A comic note, perfectly in keeping with the parodic dimension, is introduced through the casting of Depardieu/Clovis Cornillac as brothers: they were playing the parts of Obélix and Astérix in *Astérix aux Jeux olympiques* (2008) the previous year. In addition, all the characters seem somewhat fake: Gentil/Leullet (Jacques Gamblin), who set up an insurance scam and planned a murder in order to elope with his young lover, is a whiney, unconvincing criminal; as for the famous Commissaire Bellamy, he spends most of his time being a parody of detective (he is ostentatiously looking for clues in the flower beds under his own windows and is – somewhat incompetently or unwillingly – trying to figure out whether his wife is having an affair with his brother). Whenever he thinks he is about to understand or grasp

something, a void opens up beneath his feet, quite literally and ironically at times: at the very moment when he is telling his wife, with heavy double entendre 'Il m'arrive de voir la réalité' ['At times, I can see reality as it is'], she has to pull him back briskly in order to prevent him from falling into a big hole in the middle of the street.

The relationship between Bellamy and his wife is something of a riddle. They seem to enjoy a close, warm relationship[54] but, upon the brother's arrival, the chemistry between them changes and Bellamy grows more and more suspicious: from the shot of the crumpled bedsheets to the one showing his brother's open fly[55] to some elliptical dialogues,[56] many clues point towards the possibility that Françoise Bellamy might be having an affair with her brother-in-law. Through conversations with his wife and the various characters involved in the investigation, Bellamy is able to draw parallels and get insights into his own life.[57] Chabrol's obsession with symmetry and doubles (as identified by Wood and Walker)[58] has indeed never been more obvious, nor convoluted, than in *Bellamy*: Bellamy and his brother, who function as doubles, are also reflected through the Gentil/Leullet double act (like Gentil, Bellamy also tried to kill a man, his own brother); the homeless man is a double for Bellamy's brother (they meet a similar fate); Françoise Bellamy is both reflected through Gentil's wife and his mistress Nadia (Françoise too sleeps with a 'flic' [cop] as she pointed out). In this endless game of mirrors and shifting identities, there are no certainties and nothing quite fits together. The unspoken, the ellipsis prevail. However, the knot of the film seems to revolve around the tormented relationship between Bellamy and his brother. Gentil's acquitment does not coincide with the end of the film; on the contrary, the Paul/Jacques relationship can now occupy centre stage. Once he has no more excuses or distractions, Bellamy is left to face his own demons, hence his confession to his wife: when they were much younger (presumably still children or teenagers), he had once tried to strangle his brother Jacques whom he couldn't stand. According to him, it was sheer luck,

and a bit of a miracle, that he didn't succeed. Right after this confession, a series of eight shots, accompanied by a powerful extradiegetic music (Elgar's concerto for Cello and Orchestra in E minor), shows Jacques driving along a scenic route. In addition to the expressive use of music, the fluid forward tracking shots and low-angle shots on the sky and horizon, interspaced with close-ups on Jacques' broody and determined face, give a proleptic and symbolical meaning to the sequence: Jacques is driving to his death. When the morning after Françoise Bellamy tells her husband about Jacques' fatal accident, a shocked Bellamy utters the following sentence: 'Il aura le dernier mot' [he will have the last word] before breaking the breakfast tray containing the two bowls labelled Paul and Jacques. Just as for the homeless man in the Gentil/Leullet case, one might wonder about Jacques' death. Was it an accident or a suicide? Or could it be a projection of Bellamy's inner desires? Although the investigative metaphor applies more than ever, by the end of *Bellamy*, the melodrama seems to have consumed the *policier* / thriller as a genre. The film encourages the viewers to conduct their own investigation and decide what the film is really about but there is no easy answer as the parody of the thriller genre is used here to reinforce the blurring of codes and meanings. As Burdeau put it, *Bellamy* functions like a crossword without solutions: 'Cette grille de mots croisés-là n'a pas de solution, elle n'est même plus une énigme, à la limite : elle fait juste correspondre […] une incertitude esthétique à une incertitude morale' ['That crossword has no solution ; it is not even a riddle : it just makes a connection between aesthetic uncertainty and moral uncertainty'].[59] The last shot, in which light and darkness seem to cohabit in perfect harmony, is particularly revelatory of this undecidability and seems to function as a final Chabrolean allegory for life: a very slow, peaceful pan followed by a tracking forward and zooming in – a shot that has a bird-like quality – seems to retrace Jacques' last moments, from the moment his car left the road until it hit the bottom of the cliffs. The camera slowly zooms in onto the carbonised car, but, instead of revealing a

gruesome carbonized body as in the beginning,[60] the shot ends in an upward movement on a calm seascape as if to meditate on the meaning of life. This ending is asking for a second viewing of the film, especially of the reflexive beginning/*incipit*: whose carbonised body was it that we saw? was it the homeless man's  or Jacques'? And if it was Jacques', who then was lightly whistling at the very beginning: could it have been Bellamy who, contrary to what he said, 'got the last word'? As usual in Chabrol's films, the ending is left very open-ended and the epilogue, a quotation from Auden, stresses the multi-layered, reflexive structure of the film: 'There's always another story. There's more than meets the eye'.

Far from rejecting the constraint or the frame of the genre(s), Chabrol claims it overtly: he is an 'auteur de genre', to use the oxymoronic phrase coined by Moine.[61] Rather that seeking to 'transgress' or 'transcend' the limits of a given genre at all costs,[62] Chabrol is content with exploring and playing with them from within, only rarely going to such reflexive extremes as in *La Fille coupée en deux*. Thus, his consistent work *within* the thriller genre means that he too, like Hitchcock, has earned the right to attach his name to a variation on that genre. Moine notes the following:

> En prenant l'exemple d'Hitchcock et de *Vertigo*, Esquenazi montre comment le film hitchcockien (*qui réalise le cas sans doute unique où un réalisateur attache son nom à un genre*) est né par composition et dérivation d'autres genres [...].[63]
>
> [Taking the example of Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, Esquenazi shows how the Hitchcockian film (*probably a unique case when a director attaches his name to a genre*) was born as a composit of and out of other genres.]

But it seems after all that Hitchcock is not unique in having his name firmly associated with a genre. There is indeed one more aspect that needs examining under the umbrella of 'genre' in this chapter, and that is the adjective Chabrolean.

**Chabrol's generic legacy or the fortunes of the adjective 'chabrolien' ['Chabrolean'] in contemporary French cinema**

In a posthumous consecration and a testimony to Chabrol's enduring legacy, the adjective 'Chabrolean' has now become a well-established generic marker. It is indeed widely used in various film reviews to refer to a type of thriller characterised by a few or all of the following ingredients: objective camera work, narrative tension, claustrophobic atmosphere, enigmatic characters, dysfunctional family theme, class tensions and the portrayal of a provincial and/or middle-class setting. Thus, *Coup de chaud* (2015) by Raphaël Jacoulot – about village life erupting into violence during a heatwave – was described as a 'polar "chabrolien"'.[64] Unsurprisingly, it won the 2016 Claude-Chabrol Prize, created posthumously in 2011 and awarded every year to a French thriller – previous winners are Vincent Garenq (*Présumé coupable*) in 2012; Lucas Belvaux (*38 témoins*) and Pierre Jolivet (*Mains armées*) in 2013; Laurent Cantet (*Foxfire, Confessions d'un gang de filles*) in 2014; Mathieu Amalric (*La Chambre bleue*) in 2015 [*Diamant noir* by Arthur Harari was awarded the 2017 Prix Claude-Chabrol]. Jacoulot's previous film, *Avant l'aube* (2011) (centered around a disappearance in an isolated mountain hotel, and the relationship between the hotel owner and the young man he has just hired) was in a similar vein and Jacoulot himself readily admitted that he was a fan of Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* with its portrayal of class tensions.[65] *Irréprochable* (2016) by Sébastien Marnier was also reminiscent of Chabrol[66] due to its narrative tension and the exploration of an ambivalent female character in a provincial setting. Josée Dayan's TV film, *Indiscrétions* (2013), which tells the story of a piano teacher (Muriel Robin) suspecting

everyone around her following the disappearance of her protégée, is according to the director herself 'entre Hitchcock et Chabrol'.[67] A bit earlier, the Franco-Belgian film *Ordinary Man* (2005) by Vincent Lannoo, with as its key character a furniture dealer and beloved husband and father, explored the thematic of the ordinary monster with a Chabrolean dark humour. It was for instance referred to as 'Un thriller chabrolien' ['A Chabrolean thriller'] in *La Libre Belgique* of 28 November 2005. And Pascal Thomas' *Valentin Valentin* (2015), based on Ruth Rendell's *Tigerlily's Orchids* (2010), was characterized by its 'univers très chabrolien' ['very Chabrolean universe'].[68] These are but a few examples which testify to the crystallisation of a Chabrol generic brand (with a number of perceived key ingredients, mentioned earlier) in the popular consciousness. Sometimes, rather than the actual contents of films, it is a pragmatic approach to cinema that is deemed 'Chabrolean'. Thus, François Ozon, in an interview for *Les Inrocks* (10/10/2012) confessed: 'Je me sens de plus en plus chabrolien en vieillissant. Je me sens artisan' ['I am more and more Chabrolean with old age. I feel like a craftman'].

In order to get a better sense of Chabrol's influence on 21st-century French cinema, we shall examine in more detail two films, Anne Fontaine's *Entre ses mains* [*In His Hands*] (2005) and Denis Dercourt's *La Tourneuse de pages* [*The Page Turner*] (2006) which, directly for the former and more generally for the latter, owe much to Chabrol's thrillers. Anne Fontaine's *Entre ses mains* is, to put it simply, a remake of *Le Boucher*. Rather extraordinarily, the Chabrol connection is neither acknowledged by the director (who only credits as a source Dominique Barbéris' novel *Les Kangourous* [2002], on which the film is loosely based) nor by the critics. The similarities between *Le Boucher* and *Entre ses mains* are only identified by a couple of bloggers, who do not hesitate in accusing Fontaine of plagiarism.[69] As we shall see, the parallels are too striking to be a sheer coincidence but the

differences are also significant and the film is far from being a straightforward case of plagiarism.

Claire, a married young woman with a child, works for an insurance company when she meets Laurent, a vet whose practice was flooded. She helps him out with filing his claim and a strange relationship starts developing between the two characters while a serial killer strikes in Lille, murdering young women with a scalpel. The narrative pattern and general dynamics between the two main characters are quite similar: as in *Le Boucher*, the plot and suspense center around Claire's growing suspicion that Laurent might be the killer. When he brings her a souvenir from Le Havre, Claire is very relieved because, in her view, it proves that Laurent wasn't in Lille at the time when one of the murders was committed (Hélène was similarly relieved when she thought that Popaul still had the lighter she had presented him); Claire discovers a scalpel in the pocket of Laurent's jacket – an object that connects him to the murders (Hélène had discovered Popaul's lighter by the crime scene). And there are many more diegetic similarities: Laurent is never presented as a fully despicable character (he is also shown as a good and caring vet and cares about Claire); like Popaul's, Laurent's father was a deranged, dark character ('Mon père était un peu barjo' ['my father was a bit nuts'] vs 'une belle ordure' ['scum'] for Popaul's father ]; Laurent comes to Claire's office with a big bunch of flowers (when Popaul shows up at the school with his wrapped leg of lamb/parody of bouquet); Claire, fearing that Laurent is on his way to see her, hurriedly closes all the doors at her office (as does Hélène in the school, at the end of *Le Boucher*). Stylistically speaking, the menacing music reminds Jansen's haunting atonal score; the backward tracking shot in which Claire and Laurent walk together while smoking on the street is reminiscent of the shot in which Hélène (smoking a cigarette) and Popaul walk together back to the school after the wedding.

But it is at the end of *Entre ses mains* that the parallels between the films become most striking. As in *Le Boucher*, there is a final confrontation between Claire and Laurent, at night, in a secluded space (Laurent's practice vs the classroom in *Le Boucher*). Laurent confesses the truth to Claire and asks for her help ('Aide-moi, Claire' ['Help me, Claire']), as does Popaul. And like Hélène, Claire is ready to help him out. While it first looks as though Laurent is going to kill Claire with a scalpel, he eventually turns the weapon (his own tool of trade) against himself, as does Popaul with the butcher's knife. Finally, Claire will leave the vet practice alone in the dark (just as Hélène leaves the hospital after Popaul's death). Both women have had a life-shattering experience: they have established a deep, personal connection with a killer and survived the bruising encounter.

There are significant differences as well: Claire falls in love with Laurent whereas Hélène's feelings for Popaul are purely platonic; one of the murders is committed on screen (Claire's friend is killed by Laurent in her apartment), and the violence is graphic and explicit whereas, in *Le Boucher*, Popaul is never violent on screen. In a way, one could argue that *Entre ses mains* goes further than *Le Boucher* in exploring the darkness of the main female character and the ambivalent nature of her relationship with the killer. Although Hélène agrees to kiss Popaul at the end, she rejects his advances in *Le Boucher* whereas Claire is attracted to Laurent and is willing to have sex with him, at the peril of her own life, fully aware that he is the one who killed her best friend. *Entre ses mains* focuses on how far Claire's attraction for Laurent can go and shows that it does not subside after the initial shock of discovering that he is the serial killer, rather the opposite. Both women are ciphers but soft-spoken, shy Claire is an even darker, more subversive and opaque character than Hélène.

Anne Fontaine's *Entre ses mains* is a beautiful, tensely constructed psychological thriller and, in spite of the puzzling lack of referencing, a very interesting homage to *Le Boucher*. What it doesn't do as openly and profoundly as *Le Boucher* though, is provide a

metaphysical reflection on what it means to be human. It is indeed less broad in scope, and less broody and contemplative than *Le Boucher* which, as we have seen, is also an ambitious survey of the human condition from Cro Magnon to the 20th century.

Other thrillers by Anne Fontaine's, *Nettoyage à sec* [*Dry Cleaning*] (1997) and *Comment j'ai tué mon père* [*How I Killed my Father*] (2001) also bear the Chabrol imprint, both in terms of narrative and stylistic features (tension; objective camera work; use of symmetry and doubles) and thematic aspects (adultery; exploration of murderous pulsions; twisted love stories and family relationships; class tensions).

*La Tourneuse de pages* by Denis Dercourt is another striking example of Chabrol's influence on 21st-century French thrillers. Described as 'un film aux accents chabroliens' ['a film with Chabrolean accents'][70] or 'pleasingly reminiscent of Claude Chabrol's perverse thrillers'[71], it is an excellent, taut revenge thriller. Mélanie (Déborah François), a butcher's daughter, once was a promising young pianist until a failed audition chaired by a famous concert pianist, Ariane Fouchécourt (Catherine Frot), put a definit end to her hopes for a career in music. Fastforward ten years later: Mélanie now works for Ariane's husband as a temp; she agrees to come and live at their house in order to look after their son and, due to her musical background, she is subsequently offered a position as Ariane's page turner. Her role is to practice with her and support her ahead of crucially important concerts. Psychologically fragile Ariane becomes increasingly dependent on Mélanie who knows how to make herself indispensible to the whole household. Cold, cruel, opaque and unpredictable, Mélanie is a dark and fascinating female character who reminds both the unscrutable performances of Huppert as Violette Nozière and of Bonnaire as Sophie in *La Cérémonie*.

Dercourt keeps playing with the viewer's expectations: the shots showing Mélanie's expert handling of a meat cleaver may very well be nods to *Le Boucher* but they are also a red herring. One constantly expects the worse (for instance when Mélanie keeps the boy's head under water in the pool; or during the hide-and-seek game in the garden) but the physical violence is mostly contained in *La Tourneuse de pages*. Mélanie's only victim, in a physical sense, is the husband of Ariane's friend and a member of their trio: he gets punished for making a pass at Mélanie and trying to cheat on his wife and the viewer feels little sympathy towards him. One could easily see references to *Les Biches* for the lesbian theme and, more obviously perhaps, to *La Cérémonie* with the class tensions and the self-contained, cold female outsider as a menace to the bourgeois household. Thus, the scene at the railway station, when Ariane comes to pick up Mélanie, is strongly reminiscent of the station episode at the beginning of *La Cérémonie*: both Mélanie's and Sophie's cold, distanced gazes on their employers create a (proleptic) sense of unease and menace. Stylistically, the symbolic use of music and space (silent, sanitized bourgeois mansion; long dark corridor leading to the swimming pool), as well as the mirror images (fragmented reflections in the piano), add expressionistic touches that are also typical of Chabrol.

Through a handful of key thrillers (essentially *Le Boucher*, *La Cérémonie*, *La Femme infidèle* but also, to a lesser extent, *Les Biches*, *Les Noces rouges* and *Merci pour le chocolat*), Chabrol has imposed his own 'brand' of thriller, thereby influencing a whole new generation of film directors and ensuring that, next to 'Hitchcockian', the adjective 'Chabrolean' occupies pride of place in the critical reception of contemporary French/Francophone thrillers and the popular consciousness.

[1] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 4.

[2] See Hayward, *Cinema Studies*.

[3] Moine, *Les genres du cinéma*, p. 68.

[4] See for instance Forbes, *The Cinema in France* and Wilson, *French Cinema Since 1950*.

[5] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 4.

[6] Houellebecq, *Rester vivant*, p. 15.

[7] Mulvey, 'Notes on Sirk and Melodrama'.

[8] Hayward, *Cinema Studies*, p. 440. [Entry: thriller/psychological thriller]

[9] The Symbolic is used here in a broad sense and as opposed to a realistic mode of representation, not as a psychoanalytical (Lacanian) concept. Other critics will refer to the 'fantastique' and we shall focus on a specific Gothic trend in Chabrol, but it is the same phenomenon that is being discussed: namely the various cracks that occur in an otherwise realistic diegesis and tend to derealize it.

[10] Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 173.

[11] *Claude Chabrol par lui-même et les siens*, p. 112.

[12] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 42.

[13] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 63.

[14] Chabrol will recreate another wedding (more working-class than rural this time) with a great attention to detail in *La Demoiselle d'honneur* (2004).

[15] *Claude Chabrol par lui-même et les siens*, p. 112.

[16] See Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 68 and Wood and Walker, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 51: 'The whole section of the film between the two moments when she closes her eyes has an extra dimension – as if it were also, in some sense, her fantasy'.

[17] Something very similar happened in *Le Beau Serge*. As Neupert in *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, 'the ending remains puzzling, thanks in part to the oneiric narration of [the] end sequence, which differs strikingly from the rest of [the film] and its neorealist style', p. 142. One genre or style seems to dissolve little by little, insiduously, into another, thereby increasing the opacity of meaning.

[18] Blood was sometimes used as a pigment binder by prehistoric painters. Popaul himself is an unsophiticated 'painter'/decorator, who drops white paint on the carpet when repainting Hélène's flat /modern cave. The white drops of paint actually echo the red drops of blood falling onto the girl's *tartine* as if to remind that Popaul is, quite literally, painting the town/the countryside red.

[19] Hélène had arguably tried to turn Popaul into Prince Charming at an earlier stage in the film, during the *fête de l'école*. But Popaul, disguised as a marquess, looked distinctly uncomfortable in his clothes. See **pagination**.

[20] At the end, a doctor, filmed from a distance, will tell Hélène that the paperwork can wait until the following day. This is one of the rare concessions to and interruption from the 'real world' during the hospital scene and Chabrol ensures that it comes at the end and does not break the moody and oneiric spell.

[21] *Claude Chabrol par lui-même et les siens*, p. 167.

[22] Dumas, *'Le Boucher*, le mystère de la grotte', p. 50.

[23] Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation,* p. 92.

[24] Of course, one could argue that Hélène is in shock and therefore focusses on a 'detail' such as the lift button in order not to fall apart (Kieslowski, for example, keeps resorting to a subjective use of the close-up. In *Trois couleurs: Bleu*, the close-up on a lump of sugar suggests that the main character loses herself in the world of tiny details in order to avoid facing the bigger picture and the cruelty of the 'real world'). But, in my view, this psychological explanation is not enough to account for the highly coded / symbolical face-to-face 'encounter' between Hélène and the red button.

[25] Quoted by Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation,* p. 92.

[26] Deleuze, *Cinema I*, p. 111. There is an error in the English translation. The French text reads : ‘Le gros plan fait du visage un fantôme et le livre aux fantômes’ (*Cinéma II*, p. 141). The section ‘et le livre aux fantômes’ (with the verb ‘livrer à’ [‘to deliver to’ ; ‘to hand over to’] was mistakenly translated as ‘and the book of phantoms’.

[27] Deleuze, *Cinema I*, pp. 100.

[28]*Ibid.*, p. 108.

[29]*Ibid.*, p. 98.

[30] See the conversation between Hélène and one of her pupils during the visit to the caves. When asked what Cro Magnon would do if he came back to live in modern times, Hélène answers: 'peut-être qu'il se transformerait pour vivre parmi nous; peut-être qu'il mourrait' [‘Perhaps he would transform to live among us; perhaps he would die’]. This reply is a *mise-en-abyme* which summarises the whole film, or more precisely Popaul's trajectory throughout *Le Boucher*.

[31] Magny, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 133.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 133. As Magny put it, 'C'est d'emblée la notion de civilisation qui est en jeu dans [*Le Boucher*]' [‘The notion of civilisation is at stake from the very beginning in *Le Boucher*’], p. 133.

[33] **Pagination**.

[34] In more than one sense: Legagneur and Wolf enjoy playing chess in a metaphorical battle over who will ‘win’ Catherine over.

[35] Chabrol and Rohmer, *Hitchcock*, p. 66.

[36] Another recurrent feature in Chabrol’s films. See for instance, *A double tour*, **pagination**.

[37] See Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 109.

[38] See Introduction, **pagination**.

[39] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p 111.

[40] Magny noted, ‘L’enjeu de *Masques*, c’est bien cette lutte entre le cinéma et la télévision’. In *Claude Chabrol*, p. 210.

[41]*Ibid.*, p. 210.

[42] This section is based on my article on ‘*La Fille coupée en deux* (2007)’. I would like to thank Taylor and Francis for the permission to reproduce parts of my article and Tina Kover for translating this section.

[43] Françoise Delbecq, *Elle*, 10 septembre 2007.

[44] Ariane Beauvillard, *Critikat.com*, 7 août 2007.

[45] Alexandra Schwartzbrod, *Libération*, 8 août 2007.

[46] Louis Guichard, *Télérama*, 8 août 2007.

[47] Aumont et al., *Esthétique du film*, p. 12 [2001 edition].

[48] *Ibid*., p. 52.

[49] See *Les Cousins*, DVD supplement.

[50] **Pagination.**

[51] As Odile Barski put it in Burdeau, Emmanuel et Eugenio Renzi, 'Les bretelles de l'homme nu', p. 10.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 15. As Chabrol explained, the story of Gentil/Leullet comes from the Dandoneau case (an insurer accused of having killed a homeless man in order to usurp his identity and who faked his own death).

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[54] Bellamy is constantly fondling his wife, a fact that some critics have interpreted as a sign that he is impotent. Chabrol strongly rejected that view during his *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview. See Burdeau and Renzi, 'Les bretelles de l'homme nu', pp. 10-11.

[55] *Ibid*., pp. 12-13.

[56] When asked by Bellamy what was going on between her and his brother, Françoise replied with a somewhat incriminating 'quand? [when?]'.

[57] When he asks Gentil's wife: 'Vous aimiez voir [votre mari] au milieu des autres? [Did you enjoy seeing your husband among others?]', he is merely repeating what his own wife had

told him, thereby emphasising the connection between himself and Gentil. And when he is asking himself whether a man goes to see his wife or his mistress first, his wife tells him that it is likely to be the latter, justifying her response by saying 'je pense à ce que je fais' – another worrying sign for Bellamy that she might be leading a double life.

[58] Wood and Walker, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 58.

[59] Burdeau, 'Les vacances de la vie', p. 23.

[60] See the analysis of *Bellamy*'s incipit-*mise en abyme*, **pagination**.

[61] Moine, *Les genres du cinéma*, p. 94.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

[63] *Ibid*., p. 95. My emphasis.

[64] '*Coup de chaud,* polar « chabrolien » emmené par Jean-Pierre Darroussin'. http://www.allocine.fr/article/fichearticle_gen_carticle=18643360.html

[65] http://www.allocine.fr/film/fichefilm-133688/secrets-tournage/

[66] It ultimately failed as a 'film chabrolien', according to Julien Bouffartigue. http://julienbouffartigue.blog.lemonde.fr/2016/08/04/irreprochable-chabrolien-ou-presque/

[67] See Daniel Bozec's review 'Le côté chabrolien', in *Sud-Ouest*, 25 June 2013.

[68] See Jacques Brinaire's review of *Valentin Valentin* in *La Nouvelle République* of 18 January 2015.

[69] See http://y-a-s.over-blog.fr/article-anne-fontaine-plagiaire-116023618.html ['Anne Fontaine plagiaire' ('Anne Fontaine plagiarist')] and http://wordpress.la-fin-du-film.com/entre-ses-mains-2005/410/

[70] http://www.agoravox.fr/culture-loisirs/culture/article/avant-premiere-la-tourneuse-de-11714

[71] See Tom Dawson's review for the BBC on 26 October 2006:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2006/10/31/the_page_turner_2006_review.shtml

Chapter 3: The Human Beast [15,000 words]

The thriller genre so often favoured by Chabrol constitutes an ideal vehicle or alibi to conduct an exploration of evil in its various guises. As early as October 1954, Chabrol wrote a critical article entitled 'Hitchcock devant le Mal' ('Hitchcock Confronts Evil') for les *Cahiers du cinéma* and, in his own filmography, the diverse forms and figures of evil occupy pride of place. This chapter will explore Chabrol's fascination with 'monsters' or 'human beasts' through the following (overlapping) motifs: the serial killer, the automaton and the female killer. As Punter and Byron pointed out with regard to Gothic fiction, monsters 'as the displaced embodiment of tendencies that are repressed or, in Julia Kristeva's sense of the term, "abjected" within a specific culture not only establish the boundaries of the human, but may also challenge them'.[1] This is what is at stake in *Le Boucher*, for instance, through an encounter with the violent and archaic 'Other'. In general, the figure of the monster allows Chabrol to 'problematize binary thinking and demand a rethinking of the boundaries and concepts of normality'.[2] Far from providing a purely psychological study of evil disconnected from any societal setting or anchoring, Chabrol's exploration often integrates an ideological framework within which to think or rethink the figure of the killer. The most blatant example of this is the class war motif that lies at the heart of *La Cérémonie* (dubbed by Chabrol himself 'le dernier film marxiste' ['the last Marxist film']),[3] a film in which an illiterate maid and her postal-worker friend butcher an entire bourgeois family. However, as always with Chabrol, causality is blurred to the point of opacity and the nuanced, fragmented representation of the various 'monsters' participate in his joint exploration of the complexities of human nature and the potential of the film image.

**The serial killer**

Chabrol is suspicious of the figure of the serial killer, which he regards as a somewhat dubious American import: ‘Le *serial killer*, c'est une machine-type: il tue en série. Et c'est devenu la figure mère de toute l'inspiration américaine récente. Le *serial killer* est devenu l'homo américanus!’ [‘The *serial killer* is a like a machine that kills on a conveyor belt. And it has become the mother figure and inspiration for the whole American production of late. The *serial killer* has become the Homo Americanus !’].[4] However, long before Hannibal Lector's lookalikes invaded our screens and the cultural consciousness of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many films by Chabrol were devoted to the exploration of this figure. One can see there the influence of Hitchcock whose own filmography included quite a few 'serial killers', well before they became icons of American cinema: *The Lodger* (1926), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Psycho* (1960) and *Frenzy* (1972). Although the serial killer is not overtly ‘symptomatic of an increasingly violent and alienated society’[5] in Chabrol’s films – indeed, his characters operate in tranquil and even appealing provincial surroundings (*Le Boucher*; *La Cérémonie*; *Merci pour le chocolat*) as opposed to the urban setting, dysfunctional suburbia or isolated countryside of many (American) serial killer films – his ambivalent treatment of the monster allows him to explore and destabilize boundaries and reflect upon societal constructs. Punter and Byron noted the following:

> In the most chilling manifestations of the serial killer narrative [...] there is no move to contain and expel the monster. Rather than being established as the demonic other to mainstream society, the monster is explicitly identified as that society’s logical and inevitable product: society rather than the individual, becomes a primary site of horror’.[6]

While we are not explicitly reaching that stage in Chabrol's films, there is a firm refusal to designate the individual as the single site of the monstrous. And a film like *Le Boucher* expresses a profound ambivalence about the expulsion of the monster. As we shall see, Hélène's deep connection with the 'beast' jeopardizes the stability of society, of human boundaries, and of self and other.

*Le Boucher* offers a fragmented and nuanced portrayal of the serial killer. Ironically perhaps, in that he commits serial killings rather than a single act of manslaughter, the character of Popaul is much more appealing than that of Paul (also played by Jean Yanne) in *Que la Bête meure*. Indeed, the former is characterised by his generous and congenial nature through most of the film and even his final confession to Hélène (that he cannot help killing) cast him as rather sympathetic. The acts themselves – the brutal stabbings of young women – are horrific but, because they are committed off screen,[7] the serial killer manages to remain somewhat appealing. The audience never gets a chance to identify with any of the female victims: significantly, the bride herself, whose wedding occupied the first sequence of the film and who turned out to be Popaul's last victim, is shown only fleetingly and from a distance during the banquet. As for the origins or causes of 'evil', they are manifold, to the point of opacity. Just as in *Violette Nozière*,[8] different clues are provided throughout the film, which could 'explain' why Popaul needs to kill these young women: atavism (the prehistoric cave); heredity (father), the war (society's only legal resort to violence); and, to some extent, unrequited love. These are far too many and, as in *Violette Nozière*, none of them is enough *per se*, even though they are all contributing factors.

Firstly, and right from the beginning, the sense of menace is associated with prehistoric caves: the opening credits, with the haunting atonal music by Pierre Jansen, creates a sense of

unease, whilst guiding the viewer's reading of the film: it encourages a correlation between the butcher of the title − the dual meaning of the word, written in threatening red letters on a background of prehistoric cave painting, is an early clue and give-away as to the identity of the killer. During the school visit to the caves, Chabrol creates again a feeling of claustrophobia and voyeurism, enhanced by the unsettling musical score: the class seems to be keenly observed by an anonymous presence (Popaul? the spirit of Cro Magnon? see the beautiful shots filmed through the stalagtites). Hélène's answer to one of her pupils, who asked her what Cro Magnon would do today, provides a commentary on the whole film through a subtle *mise en abyme* of Popaul's trajectory: 'Peut-être qu'il se transformerait pour vivre parmi nous, peut-être qu'il mourrait' ['Perhaps he would transform to live among us; perhaps he would die']. And indeed, after failing to 'transform', Popaul does die. *Le Boucher* shows the failure of Popaul-the-caveman to adapt to the demands of modern society. Popaul's darkness, Chabrol seems to hint, comes from a distant past in which blood and violence were rife.

In addition to this underlying atavistic dimension, direct mentions by Popaul himself of his violent father ('une belle ordure' ['real scum']) introduce the more straightforward heredity card. Atavism and heredity are closely entwined to justify the presence of the human beast. In this respect, *Le Boucher* owes much to Zola's Jacques Lantier in *La Bête humaine*. But there is also the pervasive idea in the film that Popaul is damaged goods, that war turned him into a monster. See the allusion to colonial wars (Indochina, Algeria?), through the brief but shocking account given by Popaul of the horrors he witnessed and also the recurrent shots on the *Monument aux morts*. As Dorian Bell argues, in *Le Boucher* Chabrol is 'updating the thematics of atavism for a twentieth century chastised by the colonial experiment'.[9] Finally, it is clearly suggested that Popaul's unrequited love for Hélène is the catalyst for the murders: the first killing occurs shortly after they strike a platonic relationship. There are so many

different explanations to Popaul's acts of violence that, ultimately, the overcoded Chabrolean monster/human beast remains a cipher.

As mentioned earlier, the representation of violence is very scarce in *Le Boucher*. In fact, aside from the long shot on the schoolteacher's wife's body and the ultimate sequence in which Popaul stabs himself, it boils down to a highly iconic image: that of the blood drops falling onto the girl's *tartine* in an abject parody of strawberry jam. This shocking, obscene image cannot summarise better the encounter between evil and innocence. Chabrol admitted hinself that this was the scariest shot he had ever filmed:

> C'est [...] dans *Le Boucher* que j'estime avoir tourné le plan le plus effrayant de toute ma carrière: la goutte de sang du cadavre qui tombe sur la tartine de beurre de la petite fille à la sortie des grottes, en pleine lumière, en plein soleil! Je pense que je n'ai rien fait de pire depuis...[10]
>
> [In my view, it is in *Le Boucher* that I have filmed the scariest shot of my whole career : the drop of blood from the dead body falling onto the little girl's buttered bread after the cave's visit, in full light, on a sunny day ! I don't think I've done anything worse ever since…]

If indeed 'all food is liable to defile' as Kristeva posited in *Powers of Horror*,[11] then the blood-soaked *tartine*, associated with a corpse ('le plus écœurant des déchets' ['the most sickening of wastes'),[12] constitutes the epitome of defilement and abjection: the girl's food is tainted; it transgresses our sense of cleanliness and propriety. As Chabrol recognised, there is something unbearable about this: the monstrous, the abject has impinged upon the world of childhood.

Interestingly, there is only a single shot of Popaul which can be said to be a clue to his monstrous, violent side: the close-up/*regard caméra* when he finds the lighter in Hélène's drawer. In a glimpse, easy-going and friendly Popaul is gone; he knows he has been discovered and his gaze, which is intense and threatening, provides insights into Popaul the serial killer. He looks like a wild beast who suddenly feels endangered and will not hesitate to kill again to protect himself. In contrast with this shot, which epitomizes Popaul as human beast, Chabrol shows us a very different kind of 'animal' at the end: when he arrives at the hospital, dying Popaul, who is lying on a stretcher, has turned green and white and his big eyes have lost all their menacing power. In this '*tête de veau* shot' which strongly reminds a butchery piece, Popaul the predator, Popaul the butcher, has ironically been reduced to a harmless piece of meat.

As previously mentioned, everything seems to be imbued with a metaphorical meaning at the end of the film: the fog; the yellow lights of the car shining behing Hélène − which emphasise the sense of uneasiness (they look like 'eyes') and possibly convey her / society's collective guilt and responsibility regarding the 'creation' of the monster −; the Styx-like river. The rapidly flowing river seems to indicate that a ritual of purification is under way; now that the monster is dead, the community (apart from Hélène, who has agreed to kiss the beast and has had access to the 'other side') can return to normal. Hélène herself, however, looks frozen and the viewer is immersed in a type of image that Deleuze identifies as a marker of modern cinema: 'the image has ceased to be sensory-motor'; there is a crack in the sensorimotor system and 'purely visual situations' are produced (Deleuze borrows the phrase from Artaud).[13] Hélène's encounter with the primal violence of the human 'beast' has made her what Deleuze calls a 'seer' [un 'voyant'/une 'voyante']:

> The sensory-motor break makes man a seer who finds himself struck by something intolerable in the world, and confronted by something unthinkable in tought. Between the two, thought undergoes a strange fossilization, which is as it were its powerlessness to function, to be, its dispossession of itself and the world.[14]

Just as when she was looking at the red lift button, Hélène is indeed petrified: she is glassy-eyed and blind looking. She seems to have gained access to a truth too terrible to contemplate and, as a result, she is cut her off from the world and herself/her own body. She has become what Deleuze terms a 'spiritual automaton'.[15] The power of this modern and oxymoronic type of 'time-image' lies in its exploration of the very limits of representation. It seeks to extend the domain of the representable/the thinkable. The viewer sees Hélène seeing or rather in contact with the unseeable; she has gone through the heart of darkness and the resulting images are both economical (technically speaking) and powerful.[16]

The last three shots, each one more distant than the other, leave some doubt as to the eradication of the monster. Those shots, together with the worrisome music by Jansen playing in the background, create a sense of voyeurism, as if some presence (Popaul's?) was still watching over Hélène and the village from an ever-increasing distance. The point of view is difficult to establish but, in the last shot, the camera is definitely placed on the other side of the river, possibly where some of the prehistoric caves are located. This series of shots seems to raise some questions: has the savage, the beast been slain for good or is it still lurking beneath the fragile varnish of culture and civilization, ready to erupt at any moment? Can civilization ever overcome the violent instincts which are inherent in being human and on which it is, at least partly, based?

### *Landru* (1962) and *Les Fantômes du chapelier* (1982): the serial killer as automaton

*Landru*, the first serial killer to appear in Chabrol's filmography, is given a thoroughly different treatment: neither adopting what will be *Le Boucher*'s broody 'existential' approach seven years later, nor tempted by the biopic/documentary style, Chabrol creates a resolutely comic version of the real-life killer. Released in 1962, *Landru* is a rather lavish international coproduction that has little to do with Chabrol's first films. Even though it 'can be considered the last feature of Chabrol's New Wave era [...] *Landru* was certainly closer to mainstream French cinema than any of Chabrol's first eight features, and it was written in collaboration with the popular "new generation" novelist Françoise Sagan'.[17] Despite the fact that Chabrol had to compromise with the producers on some casting aspects,[18] the tone, approach and innovative *mise en scène* are, however, very much his and, as a darkly comic, killing automaton, Landru/Charles Denner prefigures in many respects the eccentric character played by Michel Serrault in *Les Fantômes du chapelier*. Right from the beginning, *Landru* is placed under the dual note of theatricality and dark comedy that prevails throughout the film. The opening shot underlines the theatrical, self-reflexive quality of the scene: the dolly-in on the Landru family, sitting stiffly around the dinner table, starts with the symmetrical framing of curtains, as if the audience was suddenly allowed onto the stage, and ends, rather comically, on Landru's bald head. The stiff, grandiloquent, artificial manner of Landru's/Charles Denner's does nothing to dispel the idea that we are dealing with a darkly comic play or pantomime. As Stéphane de Mesnildot pointed out:

> Le visage fardé et la raideur de Charles Denner confèrent à Landru une allure de pantin, d'automate de la mort prisonnier d'une ronde de femmes. C'est d'ailleurs sous la forme d'une figure de cire du musée Grévin qu'il revient dans *Une Partie de plaisir* (1974), oracle du meurtre que Paul commettra sur sa femme.

> [Charles Denner's made-up face and stiffness make Landru look like a puppet, an automaton of death trapped within a circle of women. And it is actually under the guise of a wax figure at the Grévin museum that he reappears in *Une Partie de plaisir* (1974), as an oracle of the murder that Paul will commit upon his wife].[19]

This reappearance of Landru as a wax figure in a museum in a subsequent film is a playful intratextual nod from Chabrol to a previous creation, or creature, of his that is already displaying puppet-like features in *Landru*. Indeed, Landru is represented as an automaton who lives in a meaningless, puppet-like world inhabited by statues and other inanimate objects: see the cramped shots of Landru's shop, filled to the brim with bric-à-brac and antiques: perhaps a playful reference to Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin*. As for the newsreels of the First World War, instead of providing a realistic anchoring into the period, they show mechanical, toy-like soldiers dying on the front, further stressing the absurdity and inhumanity of the 'real' world. Because communication with a fellow 'human being' is impossible, Landru feels compelled to open his heart to a statuette, as if he were particularly attuned to the world of objects: 'Objets inanimés, avez-vous une âme, qui s'attache à notre âme et la force d'aimer?' ['Inanimate objects, do you have a soul, which sticks to our soul and forces it to love?']. The quote from Lamartine, that will be followed by many others, from Baudelaire, during the film, has a dual function. Besides the obvious comic/ironic purpose, based on the incongruity of the serial killer as a poetry lover, the poetic references also allow Landru to question the world in which he is living and show its pointlessness and repetitiveness: a state-of-affairs that Landru nonetheless uses to justify the setting up of his new 'business venture' (a direct off-shoot of the war, it is implied – he will have to put an abrupt end to the killings as soon the war is over), namely marrying wealthy women or widows, killing them, and burning them in the stove of his country house. His courtship of

the women in the Jardin du Luxembourg is represented as a well-oiled serial pantomime: very similar types of shots, lines, situations; recurrent presence of a flower that the women are holding on their first date with Landru (and that, metonymically, comes to equate the women themselves); diegetic orchestra in the garden that accompanies these parodies of romance. The various women are shown as similarly gullible, mannered, ridiculous, and therefore utterly disposable; the viewer is never allowed to feel any sympathy for them even when Prince Charming suddenly turns into Blue Beard. Their inner lack of depth or cardboard-like quality is for example shown through carefully constructed shots at the train station where Landru buys tickets for himself and his *victime du jour* (two singles, one return!): Landru and Berthe are standing behind a railing, in front of a ticket booth whose window also serves as a large mirror reflecting a couple of characters and the railtracks. Given the stillness of the other by-standers, the scene looks particularly staged. Whenever Berthe moves to talk to Landru, the complicated ribbons decorating her over-the-top hat start playing a pantomime that looks, in reflection, like a *théâtre d'ombres*: this is also the moment when Landru, tells her, ominously, that she will like the kitchen of the countryhouse. The visual message is clear: unknowingly, this coquettish woman, like all the others, is part of a *théâtre d'ombres* or dark puppet show in which Landru acts as master puppeteer. And indeed, Landru is regularly cast as a sort of artistic director who stages performances or organises photo shoots for his victims at the house where he kills them: see for instance the reflexive scene in which Landru-the-photographer is making a photo of his mistress lying on a polar bear skin – the reverse/upside-down image that first appears in a dissolve could be read as a clue to the fundamental reversibility between 'humans' and objects, as well as subject/object of the gaze.

When Landru reads the letters from prospective wives for the first time in the Jardin du Luxembourg, a striking (and somewhat comic) high-angle shot shows him sitting on a chair, while the right part of the screen is entirely taken by imposing statues of women overlooking

him. Such a bizarre, slightly absurd and voyeuristic (it does feel like a subjective shot) take unavoidably calls for interpretation but manages to retain its mystery: should one see there a fitting symbol of what women represent for Landru or a proleptic clue that women are watching over Landru and will ultimately be his downfall? or is it, perhaps more significantly, yet another example of the widespread presence of statues (and dolls: see *A double tour*) in the films of Chabrol, which create an ominous atmosphere and introduce a fantastic twist. The statues therefore encourage the viewer to interrogate the status of the characters and their relationship to diegetic reality.[20] Such shots are so densely constructed and 'full' of layers as to become properly opaque.

Chabrol's innovative use of the close-up objectifies the women even further: just before Landru kills them off screen, an extreme close-up on their face suddenly freezes into an ominous snapshot. These faces are turned into masks of death; they have become even more flat and inanimate than before. Ironically, the same type of freeze shot will be applied to a flower vase, just before Landru's arrest, when the police officer watching Landru at his mistress's appartment is witness to the very staged love scene between Landru and Fernande (Stéphane Audran). We can refer back here to Deleuze's argument, according to which 'There are affects of things'.[21] The vase has been treated like a face and is looking at us, even if it doesn't look like a face.[22] Chabrol has created a world in which women (and characters in general) are mere objects and objects are treated like characters (the stove in which Landru burns women, also filmed in close-up, or extreme close-up, becomes personified: it has become a character *per se*, even a sort of icon). As a consequence of this free circulation between characters and objects, the diegesis is derealized and theatricalised. Of course, the snapshot of the empty vase also prefigures Landru's arrest; he has stopped killing, there are no more frozen masks of women but the object – that served as a prop in the little act performed by Landru and his mistress Fernande – is closing in on him.

Rather comically, Landru appears as a fastidious petit-bourgeois (who keeps track of all expenses in a notebook and always buys a single train ticket for his victims), as well as an over-worked father and husband forced to perform a repetitive and tedious task for his family's sake. As a puppet trapped into the cruel, mechanical game that he initiated, Landru nonetheless reflects, occasionally, on his practice: thus, he tells his wife, enigmatically for her, if not for the audience, 'Quand on a trouvé une solution [the serial killings], on a le vertige' ['Finding a solution (the serial killings) makes one dizzy'] and, at one point, he even expresses compassion for one of his victims by saying 'pauvre femme' ['poor woman']. In stark contract with the one-dimensional, often caricatural characters, Chabrol's camera is for its part, as we have seen, extremely agile and innovative, and constantly searches for new angles and modes of expression. The 'form' therefore manages to instil subtle, complex shades into what is, fundamentally, a world of puppets.

Besides the theatricality of the performances, the reflexivity of the film is reinforced by the playful, operatic music, which creates a distancing effect, as well as by the open stage-like quality and artificiality of the key venues in the film: see, in Landru's house, the recurrent use of internal frames and curtains; Landru's antiques shop and the bourgeois house in which he kills his victims are also very staged (emphasis on curtains and platforms on which the women are pausing to be photographed), as is the trial room with its staircase. The surprising absence of frame/wall where it is expected also reveals the theatricality of the setting: see the shot in prison, taken just before Landru's execution, when the characters enter his cell: the clear partitioning of the shot into two emphasises the fact that there is a wall missing, as if the viewer was watching a play. All these strategies combined make the audience question the nature of the spectacle they are seeing and their own status. Through the *mise en abyme* of spectatorship and reception (during the trial and at the end, for instance), the audience of the film is encouraged to reflect on the behaviour of the audience at

the trial. The latter is represented as unruly, chaotic, voyeuristic. The trial itself is a mascarade or comedy, that allows Landru to perform his little stand-up comedy numbers but, most of the time, also bores him stiff as a mere spectator.

As part of the overall mosaic, *Landru* provides an extreme example of a recurring facet of Chabrol's œuvre: the excessive, overly-theatrical Landru acts as a *révélateur* by emphasising the mechanical, puppet-like quality of other Chabrolean characters that, although more subdued in tone, appear in numerous films (Labbé/Serrault in *Les Fantômes du chapelier* [*The Hatter's Ghosts*] but also Mika / Huppert in *Merci pour le chocolat*, for instance). Even if *Landru* is hardly one of Chabrol's most subtle and successful (in an aesthetic sense) films, it works as perfect experimental ground that will allow him to refine his palette in later films. Crucially, its theatricality and self-reflexivity help understand what Chabrol is trying to achieve *elsewhere*, in a different 'dosage', so to say. As we shall see, the puppet/human dialectics is an intrinsic part of the Chabrolean world and, in particular, of an aesthetics of opacity that constantly seeks to blur the border between illusion and reality.

In *Les Fantômes du chapelier* (an adaptation of a Simenon's novel and Chabrol's own rewriting of *Rear Window*, to some extent), the mad hatter played by Michel Serrault not only lives in a house surrounded by puppets – he has murdered his wife and replaced her with a mannequin sitting by the window and, in the opening credits, there is a close-up on a waxed hatted mannequin, standing in the shop window, that looks just like him,– but he also behaves like one: his walk is very mechanical, automaton-like and his laughter, that seems produced by a ventriloquist, gives him a mad, diabolical dimension. He is both an evil puppet who can't stop killing, even when he tries to, and a puppeteer inventing a life for his would-be wife, constantly rehearsing his lines in order to fool his entourage, and manipulating his neighbour Kachoudas at will. Indeed, throughout the film, the two main characters of Labbé

(Serrault) and Kachoudas (Aznavour) seem to be playing a game of hide-and seek or to be acting in a pantomime in which Labbé stands as a parodic villain. Kachoudas' expressionless face and almost silent role make him look like one of the ghosts of the title: thus, during a key Labbé/Kachoudas confrontation in front of a mirror, in the toilets of the café, there are two Labbés appearing (one reflected and an actual one) but only one Kachoudas (a reflection), as if he were a ghost. The mirror is cleverly used by Chabrol here in order to cast suspicion over the 'reality' of Kachoudas's existence. He is a fabric doll with no will of his own, whose strings are pulled by his scary neighbour: see the close-up of Labbé's gloved hand on Kachoudas's shoulder – a coded gesture that prevents Kachoudas from going to the police station and voicing his suspicions that his neighbour might be the strangler spreading terror across town. The (Gothic) theme of the double is used by Chabrol here in order to challenge the notions of self and other: the 'psychic connection' between Labbé and Kachoudas 'dangerously destabilizes boundaries', as Punter and Byron put it with reference to the Gothic monster.[23] Similar in tone to *Landru*, *Les Fantômes du chapelier*, as a pantomime about madness, could not be further away from *Le Boucher* in its representation of the serial killer, and is testimony to Chabrol's wide range of cinematic strategies and styles.

**The female killer** or monster is another recurrent motif worth exploring in Chabrol's filmography. As Austin pointed out in his chapter devoted to 'Stories of Women', Chabrol is fascinated by female characters that he deems to be more enigmatic than male ones.[24] This is all the more true of the female killer, as embodied for instance by Isabelle Huppert in *Violette Nozière* and *Merci pour le chocolat*: cold, unscrutable, 'elliptical' characters that do not let themselves be contained or explained by narratives of causality. The psychological study always remains firmly rooted within a specific socio-historical context. As Leigh commented, 'Chabrol's focus is on a murderer's obsessions and psychological breakdown and […] he

combines this with an exploration of social conditions'. Indeed, *Les Biches* (1967), with Why (Jacqueline Sassard) as Chabrol's first female killer, *La Cérémonie* (1995), and even *La Demoiselle d'honneur* (2004), contain strong political subtexts. In *Les Biches*, there is an obvious parallel between the character of Why and Tom Ripley from René Clément's *Plein soleil* (1959) – itself loosely adapted from the novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955) by Patricia Highsmith. The fact that both films are based on a screenplay written by Gégauff might also account for the 'family ressemblance'. Like Ripley, Why is fascinated by the world of the rich and tries to imitate them. She dresses like Frédérique (Stéphane Audran) and reproduces her voice, as Ripley does with Philippe. Both characters are treated like poor relatives, even servants at times, who end up taking revenge on the rich and killing them. Although the murders are not strictly speaking ideologically motivated – Austin[25] rightly points out that Why lacks any interest in the revolutionary ideas bandied around by Riais (who is himself, ironically, a parasite leaving at the expense of the rich) and that, on the contrary, she is keen to reproduce the bourgeois model provided by Frédérique –, class concerns are tightly embedded within the diegesis and the class war lens is unavoidable. In addition, it is worth noting that in *Les Biches* Chabrol mixes the political dimension with a distinct Gothic theme (see Austin's analysis of the film as a – lesbian – vampire narrative),[26] a strategy he will re-use in many films in order to infuse dark undertones and complexify the overall representation.[27]

As for *La Cérémonie*, Chabrol's self-appointed 'last Marxist film'[28] which tells of the massacre of a bourgeois family by a maid and a postal clerk, it automatically lends itself to a political reading grid. Adapted from Ruth Rendell's novel *A Judgement in Stone* (1977), *La Cérémonie* is strongly reminiscent of the Papin sisters murders of 1933, when two maids killed their employer and her daughter with extreme violence for no apparent motive (Chabrol based two films on 1933 *faits divers* involving enigmatic female killers : Violette

Nozière, and the Papin sisters). When offered the choice of playing either Sophie or Jeanne, Isabelle Huppert famously decided to pick the part of the chatty *postière* instead of the cold, introverted maid, thereby going against past (*Violette Nozière*) and future (*Merci pour le chocolat*) typecast. Sandrine Bonnaire was then left to play Sophie whom she characterised, to Chabrol's delight, as 'un poireau' [a leek][29] (and indeed, Bonnaire's unusual fringe and stiff demeanour go quite a way in that direction). Sophie's expressionless face and near-monosyllabic utterances ('Je ne sais pas' ; 'J'ai compris' ['I don't know' ; 'I understand']) also liken her to an automaton (as will Huppert's Mika in *Merci pour le chocolat*) but without the caricature-like features shared by both Landru (*Landru*) and Labbé (*Les Fantômes du chapelier*). Like other Chabrolean automatons, Sophie has to put on a mask : in order to hide her illiteracy, she is forced into playing the role of a woman with poor eyesight. In one striking instance of black humour in *La Cérémonie*, Chabrol resorts to a pirat motif to convey the fact that Sophie is both childish, vulnerable, pathetic and somewhat menacing : when she tries the non-prescription glasses on in the shop, a close-up shows her reflected face with glasses on, framed on each side of the mirror by two ceramic figurines representing a sea captain and a one-eyed pirat. This is an uncanny, slightly disturbing and comic image, which marks the beginning of a performance or mascarade that will not end well. On one rare occasion, Sophie will get to relish her role, for instance when she pretends to read a shopping list at the supermarket. She already knows what the list consists of and clearly enjoys performing the role of a woman-who-can-read, markedly producing and putting on her glasses before reciting the whole list. But this apparently innocent and even endearing act cannot be exposed as such. Sophie's secret is lethal and Melinda's discovery that the glasses aren't real ultimately signs the whole family's death warrant.

Like Jeanne, Sophie hides another secret : it is likely that both women have killed before (the recurrent and chilling 'On n'a rien pu prouver'[they couldn't prove anything]

when discussing the deaths of their father (Sophie) and child (Jeanne) serves as a menacing leitmotiv in the latter half of the film). Although opposite in temper and tastes – Sophie has a passion for images, essentially satisfied through TV watching, while Jeanne, who resents and envies much more overtly the bourgeois, enjoys reading works of literature and poetry –, they develop a strong, mostly unspoken bond.[30] The fact that they never fully confide in one another reinforces the unscrutability of the characters. Sophie does not confess her illiteracy to Jeanne and the latter's narrative of her child's death, during the car journey leading them to the Lelièvre house, might be questioned. This night car sequence, which reminds Popaul and Hélène's trip to the hospital in *Le Boucher*, seems however to work in opposite ways : unlike Popaul's confession that provides insights into his compulsion to kill, Jeanne's account of her child's death as an accident does not ring true. As is often the case in Chabrol's films (and as we shall see shortly in *Violette Nozière*), a close-up shot on a character's face (Jeanne/Huppert in this case) does not help understand the character better ; on the contrary, and Chabrol might remember here Renoir's lesson from *La Règle du jeu*, the close-up is often used when a character withdraws within oneself or a role and becomes a cipher.

As in Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, it seems to be the very encounter of two opposite temperaments that acts as a catalyst and eventually leads to the murders. Or, as Chabrol put it, 'Ce qui est intéressant chez les deux filles, la bonne et la postière, c'est qu'elles ne sont folles que lorsqu'elles sont ensemble. Séparément, elles sont inoffensives, ce qui est un phénomène connu en psychiatrie' ['What's interesting about the two girls, the maid and the postal clerk, is that they only become crazy when they are together. Taken separately, they are harmless ; it is a well-known psychiatric phenomenon'].[31] At the end of the film, what initially started like another anarchic, child-like, out-of-hand game (echoing their brash and irreverent display at the *Secours catholique*), with Jeanne saying 'Si on leur faisait peur ?' ['What about scaring them ?'], quickly turns into a carnage. From that suggestion onwards, it

is Sophie, followed by Jeanne, who takes charge. She behaves in a mechanical way that reminds of the implacable orchestration of the hunting sequence in *La Règle du jeu* : as in Renoir's film, it is clear that the fittingly-named Lelièvre ('lièvre' is a hare in French) do not stand a chance. The naughty children (hot chocolate spilled on the bed ; Jeanne who is chewing gum and wearing plaits through a significant part of the film) have turned into cold-blooded killers and the target of their killing game is as much the notion of family (the viewer is given to understand that both Sophie and Jeanne previously disposed of their only family members) as of class.

The Lelièvre family, as representative of the dominant class, are far from being what Austin calls 'unobjectionable'.[32] Although generally well meaning, they are imbued with a distinct sense of entitlement and for Chabrol, 'chacun d'eux accomplit à un moment donné une action dégueulasse, et qui plus est sans s'en apercevoir'[33] ['every single one of them does something disgusting at some point, and without even noticing it']. Chabrol's provocative 'Marxist' message is that, while the Lelièvre, as human beings, might not deserve to die, as a class they do. After the killings, Sophie shoots randomly at the books and bookshelves in a symbolic gesture and attack on education and culture that goes a long way to politicize the narrative. But, however present, the political dimension does not single-handedly account for the murderous acts, which are also the results of a combination of personal and psychological factors. Interestingly, the 2016 Goncourt Prize novel *Chanson douce* by Leïla Slimani – a story (also based on a *fait divers*) about a nanny killing the children of a *bobo* Parisian family – can be seen as an update on this domestic class-war motif. Although the well-to-do Chabrolean bourgeoisie has been replaced by the 'bourgeois-bohème' or *bobo* of the twenty-first century, *Chanson douce* generates similar questions to Chabrol's film with the same mix of psychological and political concerns.

Rather than focussing here in more detail on films such as *Les Biches*, *La Cérémonie*, or even *Merci pour le chocolat* that have received more critical attention, we shall examine three lesser known and unjustly underrated films that provide us with insights into the multi-layered representation of the female killer : *Violette Nozière* (1978), *La Demoiselle d'honneur* (2004) and, for a study of Chabrol's youngest murderer, *Blood Relatives* [*Les Liens du sang*] (1978).

### *Violette Nozière* (1978): Fragmented Portrait of the Young Woman as a Monster

*Violette Nozière* tells the true story of an eighteen-year old *empoisonneuse* who tried to kill her parents in the Paris of the 1930ies. The script, written by Odile Barski, is based on a book on Violette Nozière written a few years earlier by Jean-Marie Fitère.[34] Chabrol presents us with a complex, fascinating, impenetrable character portrayed by a young Isabelle Huppert whose first appearance in a Chabrol film was to mark the beginning of a very long collaboration with the director (more than twenty years later, in 2000, Huppert will play a similar, expressionless murderess, lacing hot chocolate with drugs in *Merci pour le chocolat*). Stéphane Audran portrays Violette's mother and the film is generally regarded as a 'passage de témoin' between Chabrol's two muses. Violette is shown both as a naive, idealistic young woman, and a hardened, cold-blooded and scheming murderer whose thought processes and motivations are never fully explained. The structure of the film itself is far from straightforward and chronological. Although less obviously formalistic than *A double tour*, Chabrol returns to structural experimentation in order to present a fragmented portrait of the eponymous female character. The series of embedded narratives, with flashbacks which

sometimes help the viewer understand how the events unfolded but never why, make Violette's character increasingly undecipherable.

At first, Violette seems to share many features with Emma Bovary: she too is full of Romantic clichés about love and is longing for a better, more stylish existence, which would allow her to escape the confines of the tiny, cramped apartment she is sharing with her parents. Like Emma, she is betrayed by a lover (Jean Dabin as a Rodolphe-like figure)[35] who mostly cares about what she can give him and, as a result, she is desperately seeking money in order to subsidize his/their lifestyle. Chabrol emphasises how easily Violette could have functioned as a victim instead of a murderer. She is cast throughout the film as the potential victim of her father's incestuous desires: the clearest sign that incest is in the air is a shot of the father taking a peak at Violette while she washes;[36] but whether the father has acted or not upon these desires is left unresolved: ultimately, it is for the viewer to decide whether he believes Violette – a compulsive liar – or the mother, who thinks that these accusations of incest are 'ignominies' [‘a disgrace’]. Much less ambiguously however, Violette is the victim of sexual assault when hitchhiking. She narrowly escapes the attentions of a middle-aged, respectable-looking bourgeois and is left stranded at night by the side of the road. Through that episode, Chabrol seems to hint at a potentially very different fate for Violette Nozière: she could have ended up like Jacqueline from *Les Bonnes Femmes*, who was killed while on a date with a stranger. And, indeed, Violette (like her friend Maddy) has much in common with the working-class girls from *Les Bonnes Femmes* through her longing for romance and general alienation from her social background. Although not depicted as a working-class girl *per se*, Violette belongs to the poorest section of the *petite bourgeoisie*: her parents are first-generation city-dwellers (her dad makes a modest living as a train technician) whose peasant roots are made clear through the flashbacks and visions of Violette's grandmother on a farm. Money remains a central preoccupation for Violette throughout the film: it is saved by thrifty

parents, locked away by her mother in a wardrobe and values of economy prevail in the household. Although located in central Paris, the claustrophobic apartment and the neighbourhood in which she lives with her parents are far removed from the bohemian atmosphere of the Latin Quarter where Violette likes to hang around. She is ashamed of the tiny apartment and uses it as an excuse for not having to invite her imaginary friend (and alibi for all sorts of outings), the would-be sister of her doctor.

Violette's murderous act can be interpreted, to some extent, as an attempt to escape both a claustrophobic *milieu* and the grip of her family. The apartment building is shown as a prison right from the beginning: the opening sequence consists of a very slow tracking shot on the imposing (and closed) iron gate and the second shot focuses on the iron bars of the staircase, behind which Violette's feet will soon appear. Such visual metaphors for entrapment function as a sort of *mise-en-abyme* summarising the whole film.[37] Indeed, Violette Nozière will go from one metaphorical prison to an actual one and the film tells the story of this process.

There is a 'Naturalist' dimension to *Violette Nozière*, in its attempt to determine the underlying forces influencing the subject's actions. A whole array of distinctively Naturalist *topoi,* that is recurrent in the context of 19th-century Naturalist fiction, can be identified: Violette is affected by a sexually-transmittable disease (syphilis), which triggers discussions about heredity ; the nosiness of the neighbours and the emphasis on the narrow staircase are reminiscent of Zola's *Pot-Bouille*; promiscuity is unavoidable given the confined space or *milieu* (Violette often overhears or sees her parents having sex) and, although her parents are loving and affectionate towards her and towards each other, there are allusions to underlying incestuous desires. Moreover, illegitimacy (or the 'secret' around Violette's origins) functions as another Naturalist marker: in this respect, together with *Le Boucher* and Le Beau Serge

with their recurrent references to heredity and/or atavism, *Violette Nozière* is probably the most Zolian film signed by Chabrol.[38]

In *Violette Nozière*, *Merci pour le chocolat*, and even to some extent *La Demoiselle d'honneur*, murder seems to be closely linked to problematic family roots.[39] In *Violette Nozière*, the flashbacks from her childhood underline her obsession with a family 'secret'. Violette tells her grandmother that her parents are hiding something (‘Ils font toujours plein de secrets. Je suis sûre qu'ils en ont un plus gros que les autres’ [‘They are having secrets about plenty of things. I’m sure that they have one much bigger than the others’]) and she eventually learns from a stack of letters and a photograph hidden in the apartment that she is not her father's daughter. Mika, in *Merci pour le chocolat*, is an adopted child who inherits a rich Swiss family's chocolate factory. And in *La Demoiselle d'honneur*, Senta's Icelandic mother died in childbirth: the only parental presence left to look after Senta consists of a tango-obsessed stepmother and her younger partner. In all of these cases, a sense of rootlessness seems to be closely associated with troubled identities and murderous impulses.

Frigidity is also alluded to as possibly related to Violette's murderous act: while in prison, Violette recalls that Jean deemed her 'bizarre' for never expressing anything during sex and she tells her cellmate that ‘toute la cochonnerie que j'ai vu faire entre mon père et ma mère, ça m'a coupé le goût du plaisir’ [‘all the dirty things that I saw my father and my mother do together, that put me off pleasure’]. Violette blames her frigidity on her parents, thereby encouraging the viewer to think that this might be one of the key reasons why she hates them and wants to destroy them. Interestingly, this is Chabrol's own twist insofar as in Jean-Marie Fitère's book, on which Odile Barski's script is based, Violette is said to have discovered sexual fulfilment with Jean Dabin. For Chabrol's own Violette Nozière, frigidity thus becomes yet another factor to take into account when trying to decipher the character and her motives.

Therefore, Chabrol explores a wide and complex range of motives for Violette's premeditated murder(s), but, somehow, none of them, whether taken separately or in combination, are fully satisfactory. Violette herself cannot explain her act ('Il n'y a rien à comprendre' ['There is nothing to understand']): this is the irreducible 'noyau dur', expressed through the close-ups on Violette's blank, expressionless face, with which the viewer is faced and which defies all hermeneutical attempts. The film's convoluted structure, the *mise en scène* and the inscrutable performance by Huppert all contribute to convey the inexplicable nature of Violette's act. In order to achieve such opacity, Chabrol resorts to recurring devices: the mirror image, the flashback and the ellipsis.

At a first degree, mirrors and reflections function as a metaphor for Violette's multi-faceted personality. Mirrors are the most important objects in these two heterotopic spaces that we have identified in *Violette Nozière* (the cupboard under the stairs and the room at the Hôtel de la Sorbonne)[40] and they bear witness to Violette's double life: the schoolgirl in demure attire vs the seducer wearing make-up and high heels for her expeditions to the Latin Quarter. But mirrors and mirror images abound to such a degree in *Violette Nozière* that the viewer becomes increasingly suspicious as to the status of the image and aware of its instability. As identified by Deleuze, this type of crystal-image operates a blurring between the actual and the virtual, which contributes to the opacity of meaning.[41] What is 'real' and what is reflected? Where do lies / the truth lie in? Some characters, such as Violette's real father, only appear as a mirror image, which underlines his status as a fantasised object. The numerous mirror scenes end up absorbing Violette (Isabelle Huppert) into another dimension: ‘real’ character and ‘virtual’ character (according to Deleuze's terminology) get thoroughly mixed up. Thanks to this type of crystal-image, Violette becomes a fundamentally opaque character. As Guy Austin stated it: 'the mirror images of Violette act, like the contrasting glimpses of her personality throughout the narrative, to fragment our picture of her rather

than to confirm it' (1999: 131). It will not be until *L'Enfer* or *La Fille coupée en deux* that Chabrol will resort again to such an extensive use of mirrors and mirror images.

In Chabrol, mirror images are often used to reflect the instability of characters, of couples and as such they often function as a prolepsis for disintegration: see for instance Violette and Jean Dabin lying in bed at the Hôtel de la Sorbonne, framed in a mirror image. Far from being a sign of their closeness and of the perfection of their relationship, the frame-within-frame shot is constructed as a mere cliché of love (Violette is as deluded as Emma Bovary was at the Hôtel de Boulogne with Léon); its exclusively reflective nature seems to point to its falseness and forthcoming dissolution (Chabrol will use mirror shots of the Senta/Philippe couple in *La Demoiselle d'honneur* to similar effect).

One mirror scene stands quite apart in the film, namely when Violette enacts a sort of play at the Hôtel de la Sorbonne, in which she seems to hesitate between the role of the Romantic heroine and that of the erotic *femme fatale*. In the first shot, she is seen, virgin-like, standing with joined hands and reflected in a mirror. She is looking towards the camera while pretend-talking to her lover Jean. She then walks slowly to a second mirror and starts kissing her reflection passionately. On the mirror, a photo of the actress Lilian Gish, one of the great American silent film stars, provides a clue as to a possible role model for Violette. In this scene, Violette is circulating from one reflection to another, from virgin to whore and from Romantic heroine to sexualised *femme fatale*, just as she will be torn between the figures of the monster and the saint further on. The two mirrors entrap her spatially: the reflections close down on Violette, they represent the web of illusions of which she is a prisoner. According to Deleuze:

> The mirror-image is virtual in relation to the actual character that the mirror catches, but it is actual in the mirror which now leaves the character with only a virtuality and pushes him back out-of-field […]. When virtual images

> proliferate like this, all together they absorb the entire actuality of the character, at the same time as the character is no more than one virtuality among others.[42]

Not only does this little play-act or performance underlines Violette's conflicting desires, but it also, by extension, make the viewer questions where Violette's performance starts and where it ends throughout the film. By that stage, whether in or out of the Hôtel de la Sorbonne, Violette's whole life has become an act. Real/actual character and virtual character have become irremediably blurred.

Apart from mirrors, the *mise en scène* often emphasises the fact that Violette's acts, even some of the most trivial ones, are enigmatic. For instance, after a violent argument with her parents about Jean (through which, in an out-of-character outburst of rage, she blurted out her hatred for them by calling them 'nains' [dwarves]), Violette stealthily comes back to the apartment. In one of the most striking shots in the whole film, she appears standing in ominous silence on one side of the partition, like a ghost-like figure, while her parents are tidying up the flat on the other side, oblivious to her presence.[43] The carefully-framed partition clearly functions as a symbolic, unbridgeable gap between her and her family. The reason why she came back is never explained but, as Austin notices, 'her next intervention in the family space will be to attempt to murder her parents'.[44] Indeed, Violette seems to have decided *then and there* that she will kill her parents and this crucial, very structured shot functions as the visual expression of repressed hatred and premeditated murder. Right from this point in the film, the structure will become more and more chaotic and disconnected, as if to emphasise that any attempt to rationalise Violette's actions is doomed.

A significant ellipsis or crack in the narrative occurs just before the murder(s), when Violette is setting the table for the dinner organised in the honour of her (imaginary)

friend, the doctor's sister. She lights up the candles, turns towards her parents, dressed in their Sunday's best for the occasion, and exclaims: 'Ce que vous êtes beaux!' ['How beautiful you are!']. This very shot will be repeated later in the film as part of the painstaking narrative reconstitution of the night of the murder and the viewer will come to understand that, at that point in time, Violette is just about to kill her parents : the contrast could not be greater between the good, angel-like daughter praising her parents and the hypocritical Violette prepared to kill them. There follows a striking jump cut and a dizzying series of ellipses and flashbacks which, theoretically, by cancelling one another out, should help fill in the narrative gaps but do so only very partially.

Indeed, the flashback as a narrative device which 'almost always serve to resolve an enigma (a murder, a state of mental disorder, etc.)'[45] is thoroughly subverted by Chabrol in *Violette Nozière*. Rather than resolving the enigma, it reinforces it and undermines the narrative logic. As Deleuze put it:

> In Mankiewicz, the flashback always reveals its *raison d'être* in these angled accounts which shatter causality and, instead of dispersing the enigma, refer it back to other still deeper ones. Chabrol will rediscover this power and use of the flashback in *Violette Nozière*, when he wants to indicate the heroine's continual forks, the variety of her faces, the irreducible diversity of the hypotheses (did she or did she not want to spare her mother, etc. ?).[46]

Actually one can identify two different types of flashbacks in *Violette Nozière*: there are flashbacks about the distant past, when Violette was a child, and flashbacks about the near past, which help reconstruct the plotting and the unfolding of the murder. Indeed, the latter, coupled with ellipses, essentially form part of a delaying technique which helps preserve the

suspense as to how the murder occurred. But the reader can still put together some of the pieces of the puzzle (for instance through a couple of flashbacks, we get insights on how Violette was obsessively trying out different handwritings in order to write notes on the doctor's behalf).

As for the ellipses or narrative cracks (especially the one just before the murder), they also reflect Violette's frame of mind and possible state of confusion: what does she do right after the murder? Nobody knows, possibly not even herself. Why does she find herself in a carriage, then walking alone at night and being offered a ride by some young people? No diegetic justification is provided and Violette's calm, demure composure makes it very difficult to guess that a murder has just been committed, hence the viewer's shock when, once back to the apartment, she starts calmly moving her mother's body around. Could it be that one later sequence, showing her going to dance at a cabaret, took place during that very night? The timeframe is blurred: it is for the viewer to reconstruct the pieces of the puzzle which, put in a certain order (Violette seems to have gone dancing right after killing her parents), make Violette more scary and monstrous.

The first type of flashbacks mentioned, which provide glimpses into Violette's childood, are even more mysterious. What is, for instance, the function of the recurring flashback showing Violette as a child waiting for her father's train to arrive at the station? She looks delighted to see him and so does he: a very warm father-daughter relationship is established through these memories conjured up by Violette, in apparent contradiction with her later claim that all she could think about for two years was to kill her father. After the murder, when the neighbour informs Violette that her father is dead (‘Violette, ton papa...’ [‘Violette, you dad...’]), Violette will have another such vision of her father's train, which provokes a fainting episode. Unlike the first flashback of the train, Violette as a child is nowhere to be seen and the flashback is much shorter and more brutal: the train fails to stop

and her father seems to scream her name for help. As a technique, the childhood flashback would seem to imply that the motive for a crime lies in the distant past. But Chabrol plays cat and mouse with the viewer's expectations: tantalisingly, we shall not learn anything from them susceptible to explain why Violette wanted to kill her father/her parents. On the contrary, the plot thickens: the childhood flashbacks only reinforce the mystery.

Apart from some resentment building up against her parents because of a secret surrounding her origins, nothing can explain her hatred for her father. The train flashbacks could even be interpreted as some obscure expression of guilt: she failed to rescue the loving father from the runaway train and can no longer bear to see the consequences. The fainting scene which concludes the second flashback of the train is in stark contrast with the actual time of the murder when Violette carefully and remorselessly watches her father swallow the lethal drink. Just like the Mika/Isabelle Huppert of *Merci pour le chocolat*, she does not display any emotions. The extreme close-up on the father's blurry profile, with Violette's face in focus in the background is exceptionally powerful: the hint of a smile on Violette's lips while she calmly stares at her father signing his death warrant (she also had numerous occasions to 'abort the mission' during the evening and repeatedly failed to do so) is the epitome of Violette as a 'monster'.

Due to the very slow build-up towards the evening of the murder (as mentioned, the narrative is constantly distorted by a dizzying series of prolepses, ellipses and flashbacks), the murder as defining moment and real core of the film, occurs rather late (1h29/1h30 minutes into the 1h58-minute film), at a time when the prolepsis of the prison and trial period is already far advanced. Thus, ironically, it is precisely at the point in the narrative when Violette reaches ultimate 'monster status' that the other narrative (the prison/trial one) starts the opposite process of redemption and portrays Violette as a victim and a saint, thereby making the viewer's position decidedly uncomfortable. And indeed, the montage could not be

more brutal: the shot right after the disturbing *rôti*/roast scene (in which Violette is eating at the table while the bodies of her parents are in the same room) shows a humble, repentant-looking Violette, sitting on her prison bed, refusing to eat the modest prison grub. Thanks to the distorted, dual narrative, Chabrol is able to switch within a few seconds from the iconography of the female Ogre or Monster to that of the Saint or Martyr. The perspectives on Violette are therefore constantly shifting and unstable.

Violette Nozière: Beast or Saint? As mentioned, while carefully building up the case of a heartless, premeditating murderer, Chabrol starts switching towards an iconography of martyrdom and sainthood: Violette gives away her possession and washes her cellmate's feet in prison. As for the 'beast', it is alluded to at least twice in the film (therefore linking Nozière to some of her Chabrolean predecessors such as Popaul in *Le Boucher*): Violette herself uses the word 'bête' when she tells her lover Jean ‘Je vous aime comme une bête. Comme une bête’ [‘I love you like a beast. Like a beast’], therefore referring to violent instincts and implying that nothing, including the law, social pressure or family ties, could prevent her from continuing to indulge her relationship with him. And she is clearly represented like a savage beast enjoying her spoil when she feasts on the *rôti* that her mother had cooked just before the murder.[47] In a powerful medium shot, Violette is portrayed sitting at the dining table, holding the rare meat in her hands and tearing it with her teeth, while the bodies of her dead father and (would-be dead) mother lie about in the apartment. Odile Barski, who wrote the script (and departed here significantly from the book on which it is based) provides a powerful psychoanalytical/Freudian interpretation of Violette's ‘abject’ act (in the Kristevan sense):

> Instinctivement je me suis dit qu'elle allait se mettre à table et manger. Puis je me suis dit: c'est le repas totémique qu'elle ingurgite. Elle incorpore le corps des parents,

> donc leur âme, leur autorité. Elle vomit et peut enfin se faire face. C'est la vertu archaïque du contrepoison![48]
>
> [Instinctively, I thought that she would sit at the table and start eating. Then I thought : she is swallowing the totemic meal. She takes in the parents' bodies, their souls, their authority. She throws up and can face herself at last. This is the archaic virtue of the counterpoison !]

Violette might be monstrous but the fact that many of the characters representing key social values are cast in a dark light helps to balance the accounts and cast her as a victim as well. The nurses' gaze on Violette-the-patricide is openly malevolent – and reminds of the threatening attitude of the nurse tending to the abused Hélène /Stéphane Audran in *La Rupture* : the 'carers' are more interested in passing judgment than in tending to the needs of their patients (the elderly patient to whom Violette gives her watch is left unattended). Violette's doctor, when interviewed by the police, is arrogant and rather obnoxious. The police inspector and the judge are stiff and unappealing. So is the 'honest citizen' who denounces Violette to the police (he is shown as a coward swiftly retreating after Violette's arrest) and the judgemental neighbour who criticises her dress code earlier in the film is depicted as a stuck-up gossip. Society as a whole (through the crowd and the jury), and to a lesser extent the family, are seen as moralising and stifling, thereby making Violette's attempt to break through its codes much less repellent. And the real-life Violette was indeed perceived through such a lens by the Surrealists[49] who fully exonerated her for having dared to untie 'l'affreux nœud de serpents des liens du sang' ['The hideous vipers' knot of blood connections'] (Paul Eluard's poem, 'Oser et l'espoir', which turned Violette into an heroine, is distributed on the street outside the prison in Chabrol's film).

Violette Nozière is redeemed by society at the end (both in the film and in real life). The beast in her seems to have been tamed or to have died and Violette can therefore be safely reintroduced into society. As a fascinating real-life character, Violette Nozière was ideally suited for Chabrol to continue his foray into the human beast / the monster. The film allowed him to explore and subvert accepted notions of good and evil and to further investigate how to represent the opacity of evil.

### *La Demoiselle d'honneur* (2004): the good boy, the bad girl and the statue

*La Demoiselle d'honneur*, based on Ruth Rendell's *The Bridesmaid* (and Chabrol's second adaptation of a Ruth Rendell novel après *La Cérémonie*) is the director's last foray into deranged female psyches. Senta Bellange (that is 'beautiful angel': Chabrol delights in giving ironic names to his characters − Senta had the much more neutral family name of 'Pelham' in Ruth Rendell's novel), played by Laura Smet, is one of Chabrol's most puzzling portrait of a female killer. At first sight, the film is firmly anchored within the thriller genre but, within that well-practiced generic framework, Chabrol indulges in his favourite game: he breaks realism through little touches which allow him to go beyond appearances. As we shall see, the film playfully references the Gothic or horror genre (Senta's house)[50] and the fairy-tale. Senta is mockingly refered to as 'sleeping beauty' by the homeless man living in her garden and she constantly veers in the film from beautiful and mysterious princess to harmful witch using glass daggers to kill. In a parody of Blue Beard, Senta will also hand in to Philippe the key to the attic room which contains the murdered body of a woman.

Benoît Magimel portrays Philippe, aka M. Normal or M. Nice Guy, falling for the wrong girl, Senta, whom he met at his sister's wedding: she is the bridesmaid of the title. Philippe is a hard-working young man, a responsible son (to a kind but slightly fragile widow

working as a part-time hairdresser), brother (to a shoplifting younger sister), as well as a trusted employee working for a bathroom company. From the beginning, his passionate relationship with Senta does not run smoothly: Senta seemlessly mixes up truths and lies but, because the 'truth' often sounds like fiction − her Icelandic mother died in childbirth; she claims to have killed Gérard Courtois with a Venetian glass dagger −, Philippe decides early on that Senta is a fantasist and a liar. As in *Le Boucher*, with its narrative pattern built around the lighter as a marker of Popaul's guilt/would-be innocence in Hélène's eyes, Chabrol constructs the plot and builds the suspense around Philippe's slow discovery that his girlfriend Senta has killed a man in cold blood: Philippe first thinks that she is not guilty of the crime, then that she is guilty, then not guilty,[51] until the last, shocking discovery that she is responsible not for one murder but two. As Chabrol said à propos *Le Boucher*: 'I adore symmetry'.[52] Beyond the similar narrative pattern, there is another connection between *Le Boucher* and *La Demoiselle d'honneur*: during the two lovers' night trip to the sea, the camera work is very reminiscent of the end of *Le Boucher*, when Hélène drives a dying Popaul to the hospital: the road is filmed in long, fluid, dream-like tracking shots, and Senta is lying next to Philippe, just like Popaul with Mademoiselle Hélène**,** in a possible intratextual clue that she too, like Popaul, is a killer and that the cliché of the lovers on a romantic escapade is deceitful.

Although it is perhaps less obvious than in *La Cérémonie*, there is a strong sense of class divide in *La Demoiselle d'honneur*. Money is a recurrent issue and a source of much concern in Philippe's not so well-to-do family. Gérard Courtois (Bernard Le Coq), Philippe's mother's would-be suitor, belongs to a higher social class − Philippe's home is defined by its small, cluttered rooms with dated floral wallpaper and its tiny garden patio, in opposition to Gérard Courtois' much grander bourgeois house and garden − and the fact that Philippe's mother works as a part-time hairdresser from her own home is a possible explanation as to

why he unceremoniously dumped her: once she has gifted him the only object which elevated her above her working-class condition, Flore the stone statue, and introduced him to her brood, she is no longer attractive to him. Like her sisters-in-crime from *La Cérémonie,* Senta could have been the instrument of the working class's revenge on the bourgeoisie: indeed, in order to avenge her lover's mother, she set out to kill Gérard Courtois. However, she killed the wrong man and, moreover, her intended crime lacked all political dimension (the murder was only intended as a proof of her love for Philippe).[53] Although it is the target of much satire throughout the film (see Philippe's stuck-up and greedy customers), the bourgeoisie, embodied by the unappealing and ironically-named M. Courtois, is therefore granted a reprieve. In contrast to *La Cérémonie,* Chabrol resolutely steers away from any Marxist explanation in *La Demoiselle d'honneur*.

Instead, one of the keys to the film seems to lie in the stone statue of Flore. Beyond its narrative role (as given, stolen and hidden object), Flore functions above all as a startling metaphor for repression and hidden desires, whilst introducing the recurrent Chabrolean motif of the double. Flore is Philippe's dream 'woman' and a proleptic vision of Senta,[54] which, of course, makes it difficult not to draw parallels with a film by another Nouvelle Vague director: François Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (1962). Just like Philippe, the eponymous characters become obsessed with the statue of a face, well before they encounter the 'real-life' model in the person of the beautiful and beguiling Catherine/Jeanne Moreau. Both female characters share a blend of mystery, power and vulnerability. These two versions of the Pygmalion/Galatea myth, although embarking upon different generic directions (the Romantic melodrama, with an exploration of love and desire, for *Jules and Jim*, and the thriller, with an exploration of madness, for *La Demoiselle d'honneur*), both explore the dangers inherent in the objectification of a woman by a male gaze.

Realism is slowly eroded through Philippe's infatuation with Flore; the statue even adds a fantastic element to the film: the fascination of a male character for the statue/automaton of a woman is indeed a well-known literary trope in 19th-century literature, from Hoffmann ('The Sandman') to Mérimée ('La Vénus d'Ille'). Right from the beginning, Philippe behaves strangely in relation to the statue. He clearly perceives the mother's gift of the statue to Gérard Courtois as an act of betrayal. Being parted from Flore is so unbearable to him that he has to steal it, in a thoroughly out-of-character act. Philippe holds Flore, kisses it/her and even falls asleep with the statue. Flore is a sort of Galatea to a Pygmalion-like Philippe. Ironically, the statue is concealed in his cupboard, just like the young woman's body is hidden in Senta's: Flore is Philippe's own 'skeleton in the closet' in that it cristallises forbidden desires and passions.

Indeed, to complicate the matter further, Flore also resembles Philippe's mother: Gérard Courtois is reported to have told her so but this is also the reason why Philippe's late father had gifted Flore to his mother. The close-up on Philippe standing face-to-face with the statue compels the viewer to ask some questions about the reasons behind his fascination for Flore. Could the fact that she looks like his mother be a factor? Philippe seems to enjoy a very close, intimate relationship with his mother, as emphasised by face-to-face close-ups very similar to those between Philippe and Flore, as well as the fact that they hold hands when they go to the garden to see the statue of Flore. The claustrophobic close-ups on mother and son in the same shot make the viewer uncomfortable in that they seem to suggest the possibility of incest. Could *La Demoiselle d'honneur* also contain in seeds a reworking of the Oedipal myth? Is Philippe looking for a mother-like figure through Flore and then Senta? Just as in *L'Ivresse du pouvoir* (with the closeness between Isabelle Huppert's character and her nephew), Chabrol perversely sows the seeds of incestuous desires without confirming or infirming them in any way, thereby handing in total hermeneutic responsibility to the viewer.

The viewer might also wonder whether Senta is not a mere projection of Philippe's mind, a product of his subconscious, devised to exact revenge on the hated figure of Gérard Courtois. Although it is made clear from the beginning of the film that Philippe does not like violence or even the possibility of violence (he wants to switch off the news about the disappearance of the young woman and, later on, he will recoil at any mention of physical violence), in an indirect way, he is the one who triggers it by choosing Senta. On the one hand, the vision of Senta as the incarnation of Flore seems to function as an innocent Romantic marker: the coincidence between the fantasised love object and its sudden actualization − in the guise of Senta − heralds the possibility of true love; this turns out, however, to be treacherously misleading. But, on the other hand, one could argue that Senta is Philippe's own creation, conjured up to replace Flore. The first shot of Senta, at the wedding, would tend to confirm this: she appears as cold and rigid as a statue when posing for the photograph. And significantly, when Philippe asks his sister Patricia: 'Tu ne trouves pas qu'elle [Senta] ressemble à Flore?' ['Don't you think that she looks just like Flore?'], the following shot focuses on the empty pedestal where Flore used to stand. This seems to suggest that Senta is objectified by Philippe from the very beginning. Could she be summoned by Philippe both in order to fill in the void/the empty pedestal and to fulfill his secret desire to punish the man who betrayed the idealised mother? Throughout the film, Senta/Laura Smet will indeed be characterised by a certain stiffness and coldness of expression, as if she were not quite real. Moreover, she lives in the cellar of a strange house, reminiscent of the Gothic or horror tradition[55]; and her stepmother, together with her tango partner/lover, are ghostly characters, mere shadows passing by (exclusively confined to Senta's domain, they are never seen in the 'real world'). In other words, it would not take much for *La Demoiselle d'honneur* to turn into a Gothic tale of revenge and repressed desires.

Chabrol ultimately chooses to keep up (generic) appearances by not giving up on the realistic grounding of the film. *La Demoiselle d'honneur*'s multiple references to myths, to the fantastic, the gothic, the fairy-tale, which provide many layers of meaning and contribute to the density and complexity of the film, remain quite subtle and diffuse. In the end, it is up to the viewer to decide whether *La Demoiselle d'honneur* is a thriller about a good boy falling for a mad, murderous girl, or a gothic tale in which a Pygmalion-like Philippe channelled repressed desires laced with violence, incest, revenge through a Galatea/Senta. Chabrol's talent lies in the ability to propose, in a single film, various (conflicting) viewing grids and generic threads: some are more obvious than others, but none are to be excluded, and they all contribute towards his aesthetics of opacity.

Girls, much younger than Senta or even Violette Nozière, also deserves special attention. Both victims and monsters, innocent and guilty, Chabrolean girls are represented as a cipher. In this, Chabrol differs quite dramatically from Hitchcock. As he himself pointed out in his article 'Hictchcock devant le mal', children are never evil *per se* in Hitchcock's films: 'De ce combat [contre le mal], l'enfant ne saurait être un protagoniste [...] l'immense orgueil de Satan ne peut s'attaquer à la totale innocence' ['Children could never be part of this fight (against evil)... Satan's huge pride has no grips on utter innocence'].[56] Children are therefore only used as foils and, as such, they can play a key part in his films. Chabrol refers for instance to *Shadow of a Doubt* as a film centering on 'la brusque révélation à l'innocence enfantine de la terrible réalité du Mal' ['the sudden revelation to an innocent child of the terrible reality of evil'].[57] As we have seen, in *Le Boucher*, children also epitomize utter innocence confronted with evil, this is particularly true of the picnic scene. But Chabrol goes much further than Hitchcok in that girls on the cusp of adolescence can be directly involved

in evil deeds. They can even, perhaps with reference to the horror genre, be the main vehicle for evil and madness. The most obvious case is *Blood Relatives*.

***Blood Relatives* (1977)**

Generically speaking, this is one of Chabrol's most stable, straightforward thrillers. In terms of plot, the device is quite a commonplace: the least likely character and would-be victim is also the culprit. The subject matter, however, is rather subversive: indeed, Chabrol introduces for the first time (in a kind of rehearsal for *Violette Nozière*) a teenage girl as a brutal murderer, who is moreover driven, in this case, by an incestuous desire for her brother. Shot in English, with Donald Sutherland (as detective), Stéphane Audran (as housewife and mother) and Aude Landry (Patricia), the film plays at the beginnning with *film noir* conventions: rain, darkness; blurred night scenes; the detective's trench coat. Muriel and Patricia, two cousins living in the same family, were assaulted at night, on their way home from a party. The former is attacked and killed in what is, at first sight, a sexually motivated murder (the medical report states that the young woman's vagina was lacerated with a pointed object in a simulacrum of rape), whilst the latter apparently managed to run away to fetch help. The murder scene is fragmentary and unreadable due to an elliptical montage. Unlike in *Violette Nozière*, the flashbacks do not really reinforce the opacity of the character's motives in *Blood Relatives*. As Austin points out, Chabrol is rather resorting here to 'the Hitchcockian device of the lying flashback, made famous in *Stage Fright* (1950)' or rather of the lying voice-over thats misleads the viewer.[58] The most striking feature in these opening credits is likely to be a shot of the blooded, symmetrical hand prints (an echo to *Le Boucher*'s cave painting?) left by Patricia on the door to the police station – in hindsight, a first clue to her guilt.

As the key witness, Patricia starts developing a strong connection with the detective in charge of the enquiry (Donald Sutherland), to the extent that she functions as a double for his own daughter (during a walk in the countryside, he holds her by the shoulders, just as he did with his daughter in an earlier shot), in a clear indication that innocence and evil can be two faces of the same coin and a pointer to the difficulty of a father-daughter relationship. The concept of family and the relationships between adults and children are somehow fraught throughout the film: see the sub-plot with a paedophile, Doniak, initially suspected of the murder, as well as the claustrophobic family atmosphere, ladden with incestuous and paedophilic undercurrents (very similar to the milieu in which Violette Nozière evolves).

During a line-up, Patricia is put in a dark room with a stainless mirror and asked to identify the culprit. When the first suspects are brought in, her own image is reflected into the glass frame so that she appears to be included in the line-up. This is one of the most beautifully constructed shots in the film: by discretly casting suspicion onto a very young female character (the embodiment of innocence), it also encourages the viewer-investigator to engage with the cinematographic image at a deeper level and look beyond appearances.

Angelic-looking, soft-spoken Patricia turns out to be a very cunning, manipulative, malevolent child. She is quite cool and collected through her dealings with the police, and lying comes extremely naturally to her, for instance when she ‘recognizes’ a police officer on the line-up as the would-be murderer, or tries to implicate her brother in a new statement to the police. During that statement, an expressionistic shot shows her shadow coming first, before her face appears, as if to reveal her dark side. The mask will only fall at the very end of the film, once Muriel’s diary has been discovered, and the detective starts suspecting her. Patricia, who had been constantly spying on her cousin and brother and had read Muriel’s secret diary, had very opportunistically tried to use this information in order to frame various characters. Confronted by Detective Carella, she breaks down over a simple, innocuous lie

about the diary and starts screaming – an earth-shattering, Munchian scream that bursts the idyllic, pastoral bubble – while the detective/father figure tries to both contain and comfort her in an embrace. Three shots follows in a very rapid succession: one extreme close-up on Patricia's arms locked within the detective's – a detail/*mise en abyme* that echoes and encapsulates the strained, stifling father-daughter, adults-children relationships within the film ; and two shots of the surrounding fields. The contrast between the peaceful landscape and the violence of Patricia's reaction could not be greater and takes on an allegorical quality, as if to underline the inevitability of the encounter between good and evil, between beauty and violence. The recurrent last shots on Patricia's face, while she is hypnotically repeating 'he's got to love his sister more than his cousin', display a vacant, mad gaze that is reminiscent of Anthony Perkins in *Psycho*. The detective, who is looking at her, seems for his part to be pondering, with a sad, empathetic expression, over the enigma formed by the 'monster' he has just caught – his surrogate daughter.

Even when they are not murderers, girls are often two-faced, lying and treacherous in Chabrol's films (see *Les Noces rouges* and *Inspecteur Lavardin*). In *Les Noces rouges*, contrary to what Austin asserts, Hélène does not 'innocently [bring] Lucienne and Pierre's affair to the attention of the police'.[59] She knows very well what she is doing and her letter is an utter act of betrayal. Indeed, she resents the fact that her mother is keeping secrets from her, thereby betraying the close mother-daughter bond, and she punishes her for having sex with a man who is neither her father nor her stepfather. Throughout the film, she is shown as broody, expressionless and difficult to read (a Violette Nozière look-alike).

Chabrol's approach to 'evil' goes much beyond a social indictment of the bourgeoisie or society in general. His films, which carefully steer clear of any form of moral judgement, often provide a metaphysical exploration of evil and madness that has a universal relevance,

as for instance in his use of a mythical framework in *Que la bête meure*. Ultimately, the monster, whether male of female, is blurred, elusive and ubiquitous. The roots of evil, which can range from primal sexual drive to society's class structure to sheer madness, remain unclear. The closer we get to the monster (sometimes quite literally, through the use of close-up shots for example), the less we understand him/her. But nobody is innocent in Chabrol's world (quite fittingly, one of his films is entitled *Les Innocents aux mains sales* (1975) / *Innocents with Dirty Hands*), neither children nor the audience. As reflected through various strategies (including the recurrent use of masks, doubles and mirrors), Chabrol's fragmented representation of evil and madness forms an integral part of his aesthetics of opacity.

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[1] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, p. 264.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 264.

[3] Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 139.

[4] Chabrol, *Pensées, répliques et anecdotes*, p. 110.

[5] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, p. 265.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 266.

[7] There is only one very brief shot of one of the victim's body (after the school visit to the cave) and the camera angle (long shot) prevents identification with the victim.

[8] **Pagination.**

[9] See Bell, 'Cavemen Among Us', p. 39. Bell also claims that 'to the Cro-Magnon caves long sanitized for schoolhouse consumption and the distant colonial wars officially whitewashed

of their savagery, Chabrol reattaches the Freudian legacy of each man's encounter with the ancestral and the savage inside him', p. 52.

[10] *Claude Chabrol par lui-même et par les siens*, p. 112.

[11] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 75.

[12] *Ibid*., p. 3.

[13] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 174.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 175.

[15] *Ibid*., p. 175.

[16] Indeed, a similar economy of means with similar effects on the receptor is achieved in literary fiction by Conrad at the end of *The Heart of Darkness*, when Kurtz famously mumbles 'The horror! The horror!'.

[17] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, p. 152.

[18] Thus, Danielle Darieux and Michèle Morgan, famous actresses of the time, played some of Landru's victims; but Chabrol got his way for Landru, with Charles Denner in the main role.

[19] du Mesnildot, 'Les diaboliques', p. 14.

[20] See Chapter 6, **pagination**.

[21] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 108.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 126.

[23] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, p. 266.

[24] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 125.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 45-47.

[27] **Pagination.**

[28] **Pagination**.

[29] Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 139.

[30] The zoom on Sophie and Jeanne while they are watching TV together and hugging hints at a possible lesbian relationship. This could be a nod towards the Papin sisters case.

[31] Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 139.

[32] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 153.

[33] Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 139.

[34] Fitère, *Violette Nozière*.

[35] See Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 129.

[36] However, significantly, Violette notices his gaze, which might be an indication that she then uses this incident later on in order to build a case against the father. Had Violette not intercepted the father's gaze, the viewer would have been the only witness to the forbidden gaze and the possibility that incest did take place would have been considerably reinforced.

[37] This is a technique which Chabrol applied to numerous films (see for instance *Masques*, or *La Fleur du mal* and *Bellamy* for recent examples). **Pagination.**

[38] As we have seen, Chabrol was very influenced by 19th-century literature in general and by Balzac in particular. But his obsession for the 'human beast' in all its guises makes him much closer to Zola and Naturalist literature that has been acknowledged (as far as we know, Bell's article on *Le Boucher* is the only one which draws parallels between Chabrol and Zola).

[39] This is of course a key Chabrolean topic (see *La Fleur du mal* for instance).

[40] See Chapter 5 on Chabrolean spaces as heterotopias of crisis **[pagination].**

[41] **Pagination**.

[42] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 73.

[43] See Austin's convincing analysis of the shot as the expression of the theme of repression, in *Claude Chabrol*, p. 130.

[44] *Ibid*., p. 130.

[45] Hayward, *Cinema Studies*, p. 133.

[46] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, pp. 51-52.

[47] One could see here a nod towards Hitchcock's *Lamb to the Slaughter*, in which the piece of meat also occupies a pivotal role in the murder narrative (as murder weapon).

[48] 'Entretien avec Odile Barski', *Positif*, 605-606, p. 60.

[49] Seventeen Surrealist poets or painters collaborated to the collection entitled *Violette Nozières*, Editions Nicolas Flamel, Bruxelles, 1st December 1933. The publishing house Nicolas Flamel was founded in Belgium in order to publish this very collection, which was then secretly imported into France. See Fontvieille, 'La question de l'énonciation', pp. 90-111.

[50] **Pagination**.

[51] Philippe's chance encounter with Gérard Courtois and the overwhelming relief he feels when seeing him very much reminds mademoiselle Hélène's reaction when Popaul produces the lighter she had presented him.

[52] Yakir, 'The Magical Mystery World of Claude Chabrol', p. 4.

[53] Senta is strongly gender-conscious (she bluntly rejects the gender-coded term 'actrice' and tells Philippe off for saying that her room/cellar does not look 'like a girl's apartment' − clearly, her feminist leanings become discredited and ridiculous by the end, in light of the young woman's murder) but she does not appear to be socially aware. She does not comment on Philippe's or Courtois' social backgrounds; if anything, she seems to resent the homeless man much more than the bourgeoisie. Her only ideology is a Nietschean version of the overman (or overwoman), which she feeds a weary Philippe: 'Nous sommes des gens d'exception, nous sommes au-dessus de tout, des lois, de la morale' ['We are exceptional people; we are above everything, above the law and morality'].

[54] One could draw a parallel with Violette Nozière's dream of Jean Dabin in the hotel, before she actually meets him. Both visions turn out to be misleading.

[55] **Pagination**.

[56] Chabrol, 'Hitchcock devant le mal', p. 23.

[57] *Ibid*, p. 24.

[58] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, pp. 101-102.

[59] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 89.

# Chapter 4: Family Secrets

The Family becomes the focus of intense investigation and dislocation in Chabrol's films, whether it be in thrillers or melodramas. Chabrol seems to have made his own Tolstoy's famous opening sentence: 'Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way'. There are very few happy families in Chabrol's world and they often do not end well (*La Cérémonie*). The murderer or monster is almost always a family member (*Au cœur du mensonge*) or in the wider sense a well-integrated member of the community (*Le Boucher*), and much more rarely an outsider (*La Cérémonie*). This chapter will explore Chabrol's bleak and complex depiction of the family through the following key issues: incest; the couple; family rituals and the role of the patriarch.

## Incest

Incest is the dark secret that is often to be found at the heart of Chabrol's cinema, ranging from *Violette Nozière* to *Blood Relatives* and *La Fleur du mal*. Although underlying, it is already (omni)present in his first feature, *Le Beau Serge*, through the character of Glomaud. This old peasant (interpreted by Edmond Beauchamp) rapes his (step)daughter Marie and it is implied that he might be the father of his daughter Yvonne's stillborn, disabled baby.[1] Incest could then be a determining factor that accounts for Serge's unhappiness and drinking habit and it also used to emphasise the bestiality of the countryside mores as part of a Naturalist (in a Zolian sense, in an echo of *La Terre*) or neorealist anchoring that characterizes a large segment of the film.[2]

For Chabrol, evil often comes from within (the family) rather than from the outside. As he said, in relation to *Blood relatives*:

> What's frightening is that there's a father, a mother, and children – they are all pressed together – it's disgusting... I don't see how people can live that way – and yet it has such strength. It's masochistic; they are unhappy but it endures'.[3]

Incestuous relationships are sometimes only suggested: incest becomes a possible interpretation and Chabrol, skilfully, and rather perversely, leaves it to the audience to decide one way or the other. This is the case in *L'Ivresse du pouvoir*, where Jeanne/Isabelle Huppert and her nephew (played by Thomas Chabrol) seem to enjoy a closer and warmer relationship than she does with her husband. Chabrol's choice of shots (close-up on their faces framed together) emphasises their closeness and the elliptical dialogue does nothing to dispel the feeling that they are unduly close (as when the nephew tells Jeanne, 'Je ne peux rien t'offrir' ['I have nothing to offer you']).

Incest is an implicit motif throughout *Blood Relatives* (together with pedophilia): the young couple having a secret relationship within the family home, Andrew and Muriel (the murder victim), are first cousins and, according to Andrew and Patricia's father, 'Andrew and Muriel were like brother and sister', which makes their affair even more socially unacceptable. The *petit bourgeois* family unit is shown as promiscuous with its cramped living quarters and Muriel was desperately seeking a way out of this claustrophobic atmosphere before she was murdered. In an attempt to break off her affair with Andrew, she was looking in the Bible for confirmation that cousins cannot have a relationship. And in a voice-over reading of her diary, she confessed: 'This house terrifies me' (a line accompanied by a very slow and striking tracking-out shot of the family having a meal). Even the

inspector's daughter tells her dad (Donald Sutherland) 'I like it when I hold you like this... Dad, we're like lovers', thereby attracting the viewer's attention to the omnipresence of the motif. The murderous act itself is motivated, as we saw in the previous chapter, by Patricia's jealousy towards her cousin Muriel and her secret love for her brother Andrew. At the end of the film, once Patricia has been revealed as the violent, psychopathic sex-predator who murdered Muriel, she keeps repeating 'he's got to love his sister more than his cousin'. In *Blood Relatives*, the various incestuous subcurrents converge towards this ultimate and shocking double revelation: incest and murder are interconnected, embodied by the youngest and most innocent-looking, and all bred under the auspices of the Family.

However, never is incest more central than in *La Fleur du mal*, where it is the main theme and plot device. The title itself, beyond the reference to Baudelaire, functions as an allegory for incest. The film, based on a script written by Caroline Eliacheff and Louise L. Lambrichs, is a psychological thriller with elements of political and family drama, which centers around the members of the very bourgeois Charpin-Vasseur family (knowing Chabrol's liking for puns of all sorts – the slaughtered family in *La Cérémonie* was called Lelièvre or 'hare' in French –, one cannot help thinking that the phonetic proximity of 'Charpin-Vasseur' with the 'lapin-chasseur' dish, that is 'rabbit hunter-style', is no coincidence). The films starts when the prodigal son, François (Benoît Magimel), comes back home after a few years in America where he had escaped partly in order to distance himself from a father whom he dislikes profundly, partly in order not to fall in love with his attractive stepsister, Michèle (Mélanie Doutey). His ambitious stepmother Anne Charpin-Vasseur (Nathalie Baye) is just starting a career in local politics, to the dismay of her husband, serial womaniser Gérard Vasseur (Bernard Le Coq), and the bourgeois household is held together

by the apparently benign old aunt, tante Line (Suzanne Flon), who looks very keenly on the budding romance between stepbrother and sister François and Michèle.

There are three types of (interconnected) family secrets in *La Fleur du mal*: collaboration, incest and murder. Firstly, an anonymous letter, reminiscent of Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Corbeau*, and which might have been sent by Gérard Vasseur himself as he resents his wife's political ambitions, is sent to Anne Charpin-Vasseur in order to smear her political campaign. The letter makes it clear that the family is hiding a dark story of collaboration with the Nazis: tante Line's father was a collaborator who betrayed his own son, a member of the Resistance, to the Nazis before being killed himself in mysterious circumstances – by his own daughter Line as the viewer soon discovers. Secondly, the anonymous letter reveals that the family is completely inbred, with members of the Charpin and the Vasseur families inter-marrying for generations. As the film moves along, it slowly becomes clear that Michèle and François might even be real brother and sister (and not just stepbrother and stepsister), in an echo of the incestuous relationship that tante Line had with her own brother, also called François. Thirdly, just as Tante Line murdered her own father to avenge her brother/lover's death, Michèle ends up killing her stepfather when he drunkenly assaults her.

Chabrol's perversity, and no small feat, lies both in making the viewer identify strongly with characters who are incestuous killers (tante Line and Michèle) and in presenting incestuous relationships as 'normal' or, at the very least, highly sympathetic. The allusion to Baudelaire turns out to be a red herring: the significant 19th-century reference in *La Fleur du mal* is more likely to be to Zola and his *Rougon-Macquart* series. Like Zola, albeit in a much more condensed manner, Chabrol sets out to investigate the influence of heredity and milieu, and to study the family ‘flaws’ of a few generations of Charpin-Vasseurs, from WW2 to the turn of the 21st century. Whereas Adelaide Fouque, known as ‘tante Dide’, is the common

ancestor for both the Rougon and the Macquart families in Zola's famous ‘natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire’, ‘tante Line’ is the knot of the Charpin-Vasseurs'. She is the one who brings in incest and murder as the original sin (although they are hardly described as such in the film) and is therefore responsible for the subsequent curse weighing on the family (just like Tante Dide's madness affects the whole Rougon-Macquart descendence).

A kind, mild-mannered, benevolent figure, albeit an incestuous murderess, tante Line epitomizes the oxymoronic ‘flower of evil’ of the title. As the quintessential harmless little old lady who had no qualms in committing murder, tante Line's character might owe to such farcical black comedy as Frank Capra's *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944), a film that revolves around an outwardly respectable family which turns out to be composed of homicidal old ladies. Tante Line also functions as a fairy-tale character: she is Michèle and François’ good fairy who gives them the key to her 'magic house' or house of incest in which they can safely consumate their relationship away from the bourgeois house and the gaze of the patriarch. Without breaking the realistic framework by venturing into fantasy, Chabrol nevertheless seems to imply through the *mise en scène* that tante Line is endowed with a witch's special powers. Indeed, just before Michèle kills her own stepfather, tante Line is shown gazing at the moon in a state of trance. The moon has triggered recollections of the night when she killed her father and this episode functions as a prolepsis for the event which is about to unfold, that is Michèle's killing of her own stepfather, Gérard Vasseur. The montage seems to imply that tante Line wanted Gérard to die: she is the one who makes it happen through her double, Michèle. This way she can redeem herself while saving the young Michèle.

Chabrol's avowed liking for symmetry and doubles (see *Le Boucher*, for instance) shows here through the Micheline (aka tante Line)/Michèle relationship. The similar names are an indication that the two women are conceived as doubles or reflections of each other.

One remarkable, very Langian shot of a threatening environment, which occurs quite early in the film, emphasises the special link between tante Line and Michèle: both women, sitting in the living room of the bourgeois house, are filmed through a birdcage.[4] This metaphor for entrapment hints that they are locked together in the cage of heredity, the Family and, above all, patriarchy. Through this expressionist and proleptic *mise en scène*, Chabrol puts for the first time tante Line and Michèle in the same basket, so to say. The viewer is warned; their destiny or battle will be very similar: both are in love with their brothers and both need to kill the father figure which is an obstacle to that love. The only way out of the cage is to kill the patriarch(s).

History keeps repeating itself in *La Fleur du mal*. As tante Line says, 'le temps n'existe pas, c'est un présent perpétuel' ['time does not exist, it is a perpetual present']. For Chabrol, this very 'Kantian' notion of time is at the heart of the film,[5] although one could argue that *La Fleur du mal* also seems to enact some version of Nietzsche's eternal return. This is indeed reflected through a shot in the opening sequence (devoted to the first murder scene, when tante Line killed her father) which is then duplicated, with small differences, at the end: both tante Line and Michèle are sitting on the floor in their bedroom, next to the window. And the two bodies of the murdered patriarchs are lying on the floor in a very similar fashion. Time and place seem to have merged, and tante Line and Michèle are just one. The main difference, though, as tante Line points out herself is that Michèle has got her own lover/brother François to help her through the crisis. And indeed, Michèle and François are shown joining together the party celebrating the election of Michèle's mother as town mayor.

The handling of the space/time relationship and the choice of incest as its main theme both encourage a mythical interpretation of *La Fleur du mal*. Some of Chabrol's films openly engage with 'myths' (*Que la Bête meure*, *La Décade prodigieuse* or *La Rupture* with its epigraph from *Phèdre*) but many others do so in a more subtle way. As previously

mentioned, Chabrol, like Balzac, keeps turning contemporary matter into myths.[6] Chabrol said himself during the making *La Demoiselle d'honneur*: 'Il faut une accroche avec la réalité pour la dépasser' ['One needs some kind of anchor into reality in order to be able to go beyond it'].[7] Without sacrificing the realism inherent in his representation of the society of his time, we saw that Chabrol was interested in creating myths, that is in depicting universal situations and characters. Just like Balzac was exploring passions, ambitions and ideas,[8] Chabrol proceeded to dissect Jealousy (*L'Enfer*), Revenge (*Que la bête meure*), Madness/the Monster (*Les Fantômes du chapelier*; *La Demoiselle d'honneur*); Unfaithfulness (*La Femme infidèle*), Power (*L'Ivresse du pouvoir*). *La Fleur du mal* is Chabrol's modern myth about Incest.

In *La Fleur du mal*, Chabrol manages to give a full facelift to murder and incest, which are recast respectively as self-defence and true love. The film also contains a strong feminist message: once the bad fathers/husbands are dead, women thrive. Ironically, *La Fleur du mal* has a double happy ending: women have scored victories both on the political and on the family fronts. Gérard Vasseur is smoothlessly replaced by Anne Charpin-Vasseur's trusted helper (and would-be lover, as Chabrol hints on a few occasions), Matthieu Lartigue (Thomas Chabrol), who acts as *maître de maison* as if the former had never existed. Bourgeois appearances are safe: the 'tâchons de faire bonne figure' ['Let's try to make a good impression'] pronounced by Anne/Nathalie Baye is reminiscent of La Chesnaye's speech at the end of *La Règle du jeu* (a film that Chabrol saw more than eighty times). And unlike the two female killers from *La Cérémonie*, tante Line and Michèle are pleasant and friendly. They killed men who were despicable, controlling and abusive and the viewer is likely to be on their side. *La Fleur du mal* is a subversive tale of female sisterhood and empowerment and Chabrol's depiction of the (bourgeois) family is as toxic as ever.

Family connections are often ambivalent in Chabrol's films, leaving the audience with a feeling of unease. In *Rien ne va plus*, it is impossible to decide whether the two main characters are father and daughter or husband and wife, or uncle and niece, etc. Such carefully-preserved uncertainty echoes other elements in the film (convoluted plot) and participates in the elaborate game that Chabrol plays with the audience. Family ties are deeply fraught, blurred, overdetermined. As mentioned, in *L'Ivresse du pouvoir,* aunt and nephew share intimate jokes and gestures. And while the film undoubtly provides an indictment of the political and legal world and its inner corruption, it works mostly as the portrait of a complex, enigmatic woman, her quest for power and her professional and personal downfall. In *Bellamy*, the relationships between Paul Bellamy, his wife and his brother are similarly fraught and opaque. In such a troubled network of relationships, one might wonder what is left of the couple in Chabrol's films.

**The couple**

Whether it be in *La Femme infidèle*, *Bellamy*, *Une Partie de plaisir* or *L'Enfer*, (married) couples are either highly dysfunctional or the result of a mysterious, fragile alchemy. According to Sandrine Bonnaire, Chabrol's vision of women as both fascinating, unreliable and manipulative, accounts for this troubled representation of the couple:

> Les femmes sont en même temps fascinantes et garces chez lui. Cette double face des femmes est pour moi l'une des clefs de son œuvre. Elles sont aimées, amoureuses, et en même temps manipulatrices. Cela doit correspondre à sa vision profonde des rapports du couple et des ennuis que cela peut engendrer, quand l'un des deux ne respecte plus la règle du jeu. Il y avait une façon d'évacuer le sujet dans ses films comme si la femme l'effrayait d'une certaine façon[9].

> [Chabrolean women are at once fascinating and bitchy. This double side of women is, for me, one of the keys to his œuvre. They are loved; they are in love and they are manipulative all at once. This must correspond to his inner vision of the couple and of the problems that can arise when one of them does no longer obey the rule of the game. He would tackle the topic in his films as if he were scared of women in some ways.]

The recurrent use of ellipses, unspoken words and double entendres often makes it difficult to understand what is going on between husbands and wifes. It is the case in *L'Ivresse du pouvoir* and *Bellamy* for the later films, but also in one of Chabrol's underrated films of the late 1990ies: *Au cœur du mensonge* (1998). Based on a script and dialogues by Chabrol and Odile Barski, *Au cœur du mensonge* stands out as a rare film in Chabrol's *œuvre* in that it provides the detailed anatomy of a married couple and a love story. It is also, as we shall see, Chabrol's most Magrittian film[10] and a subtle investigation into 'la trahison des images' ['the betrayal of images'], whether they be pictural or filmic.

Struggling painter René (Jacques Gamblin) and his wife Viviane (Sandrine Bonnaire) lead uneventful lives in a small town in Britanny when their peace is shattered by a series of events: the murder of a young girl, Eloïse, right after her weekly drawing lesson with René; the arrival in town of a high-profile Parisian journalist and writer (Antoine de Caunes) with whom Viviane has a fling, and the suspicious death of the writer who was brought back home by René after a boozy dinner at his and Viviane's house. In typical Chabrolean fashion, *Au cœur du mensonge*, mostly uses the thriller genre as an alibi. Indeed, the murder of the girl is quickly treated as a secondary plot as the investigation led by the chief inspector Lesage (Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi) reaches a dead end: the culprit (a respected member of the

community, husband, father and grand-father) is only caught by chance, thanks to the zeal of a teenage would-be detective. The real focus of the film lies elsewhere, in the tormented, opaque character of the painter and his relationship with his muse / wife. Although loving, their relationship is deeply fraught and, through most of the film, they seem to be caught in the heart of lies of the title.

*Au cœur du mensonge* could in some ways be seen as a remake of *La Femme infidèle*. As in Chabrol's 1968 film, this is the story of an adulterous woman[11] whose husband is apparently driven to insane jealousy and kills his wife's lover. However, in spite of his confession toViviane, some doubt remains as to whether or not René killed the writer. Could he have lied in order to prevent his friend from going to prison? The editing is ambivalent: a quick flashback, during the confession, shows René trying to strangle the writer but it could just as easily be interpreted as an illustration of René's unreliable narrative (and a variation on the Hitchcockian's lying flashback). The only certainty is that this confession brings the couple closer together. The end of the film, with Viviane's echoing words 'René, René, René' and the couple's passionate embrace in front of the sea, is Chabrol's most Romantic ending. However, it is also a deeply self-conscious, reflexive ending in which Chabrol seems to interrogate the nature of the (filmic) image. The fragmented last few moments, consisting of three brief shots or snapshots of the couple from different angles (each underlined by a diegetic echo of Viviane's voice calling 'René'), attract the viewer's attention on formal features and on the framing process. They can remind the series of surprisingly brief shots taken when René and the writer were discussing lies, truth and appearances during dinner. The form then seemed to be echoing or illustrating the content of the conversation, by attracting the attention on the narrative act itself (and the two characters were reflected in the window behind the writer as a further *mise en abyme* of the thin line between real and illusion). Similarly, rather than on the couple itself, it is on the representation or the *image* of

the couple that Chabrol focuses at the end. A certain distance is created that encourages the viewer to think of cinema as producing images, illusions and therefore fiction or 'lies'.

Although the couple are reunited at the end, they seem to be doomed. Indeed, there is a definite whiff of death surrounding them: after Viviane reassures René that she is now by his side for good, he welcomes her, rather enigmatically, into 'death's realm' ('Bienvenue au royaume des morts') – a sentence that echoes Chabrol's earlier representation of the couple through a visual metaphor of death and entrapment : at the girl's funeral, the last low-angle shot on the girl's coffin in the ground was immediately followed by a low angle shot of Viviane and René lying together in bed, in the darkness, as if they were themselves either dead or buried alive.

*Au cœur du mensonge* not only provides a complex, nuanced vision of love. As a deeply reflexive film or *trompe-l'œil*,[12] it also raises questions about the blurry relationship between 'reality' and representation, between truth and lies, between art and lies. Is art a form of deception, is it an illusion or does it contain some kind of 'truth'? René said that 'l'imagination, c'est pas vraiment le mensonge, c'est même le contraire' ['imagination is not really a lie, it is even the opposite of it'], a view that Chabrol seems to subscribe to, he who clearly supports René, the real, talented artist (and possible murderer) against the superficial, vain writer Desmot. And just like René is obsessed with *trompe-l'œil*, Chabrol playfully provides Magrittian (*La Condition humaine*–like) shots of his character painting the sea in front of it. He also experiments with landscape shots that make it impossible for the viewer to decide whether it is the 'real' sea that the camera focuses on or a close-up of a painting. The relationship between appearances and 'truth'/'reality' and the impossibility of pinning down the latter is indeed a very Chabrolean concern and the *trompe-l'œil* could be used as a metaphor for most of Chabrol's *œuvre*.

As we shall see in Chapters 5 and 6, *Une partie de plaisir* (1974) and *L'Enfer* (1993), which both document the slow process of destruction of a family by unstable and violent male figures, provide an even more pessimistic approach to marriage and the couple.

**Family rituals and the role of the patriarch**

Family relationships are often inseparable from incest or adultery (or indeed both, as in *La Fleur du mal*). As a result, a number of natural or adopted children are troubled by or trying to trace their origins in Chabrol's films. In its investigative dimension, this quest mirrors both other diegetic events and the reception process: see for instance *Merci pour le chocolat* in which Jeanne (Anna Mouglalis) might or not have been swaped at birth with the son of a famous pianist, André Polonski (Jacques Dutronc). She is so desperate to meet him that she shows up unannounced at his house. This visit leads her to investigate in turn another, much more sinister story: André Polonski's wife Mika (Isabelle Huppert) has been putting sleeping pills into her stepson's hot chocolate and she might be responsible for the death of his first wife. As a source of secrecy and underlying menace, these troubled heredities are often presented as a trigger for madness and murder: see *Violette Nozière*, but also *Merci pour le chocolat.* Mika was an adopted child and the viewer is led to believe that this resulted, at least partly, in the deep feeling of inadequacy she expressed at the end of the film: 'Je ne suis rien; je suis une pièce rapportée' ['I am nothing; I am just a hanger-on']. However fraught the relationships, families present a rigid mask or façade and rely on a number of coded practices or rituals. Mika in *Merci pour le chocolat* is a polished hostess who is holding the Polonski household together. She is also running a chocolate factory and various charitable funds with efficiency and decorum; she masters the social codes and conventions of Swiss upper-middle class to such perfection that nobody would think of her as a killer. Appearances and

superficial engagement with others are what allows her to keep up with the mascarade for so long undetected: the numerous close-up shots on her face only reveal a smooth, blank, contained canvas/mask. For Mika, family relationships and love are nothing but performances or play-roles: 'Moi à la place d'aimer, je dis "je t'aime", et on me croit' ['Instead of loving, I say "I love you", and people believe me']. Through this extreme example of a dormant psychopath, Chabrol is casting suspicion over the very notion of (bourgeois) family, which is exposed as an empty shell, a role to be performed and the breeding ground for all sorts of pathological behaviours.

The Family meal plays a key part in Chabrols' films. Such a carefully-constructed bourgeois ritual becomes the site of an intense underlying power struggle. The family meal often turns into a parody, a theatrical act in which each character plays a role and is aware of doing so (see *Que la bête meure*). The Family becomes a mere performance, a mask that cannot hide the emptiness and cruelty that lies beneath the surface. In Chabrol's films, recurrent shots show the patriarch at the head of the table surrounded by the rest of the family. These are very structured, often symmetrical types of shots in which the patriarch is bluntly facing the camera and therefore exposed to the viewer's sense of ridicule. He is a farcical, pompous character – see for instance *Les Noces rouges* and *Inspecteur Lavardin* – and the satirical vein is often reminiscent of Flaubert's 'mœurs de provinces' ['life in the provinces']. In order to understand better the dynamics and dysfunctionality of the (bourgeois) family, let us focus on *Poulet au vinaigre* and *Inspecteur Lavardin*.

*Poulet au vinaigre* (1985) and *Inspecteur Lavardin* (1986) are perfect examples of films whose plots are either partially (for the former) or entirely (in the latter's case) constructed around missing or problematic father figures. Produced by Marin Karmitz, these two generically-classic *polars* helped relaunch Chabrol's career in the the mid-1980ies. In the wake of *Poulet au vinaigre*'s critical and popular success, Chabrol made *Inspecteur Lavardin*

as a sequel, as well as a TV series for TF1, *Les Dossiers de l'inspecteur Lavardin* (with the first two episodes, out of four in total, directed by Chabrol: *L'Escargot noir* in 1987 and *Maux croisés* in 1988). Both films (and TV episodes) star Jean Poiret as Inspecteur Lavardin, a decidedly eccentric cop who takes matters of justice in his own hands. His unorthodox methods involve protecting the widow and orphan by letting the killer of a corrupt bourgeois bully go unpunished (*Poulet au vinaigre*) and framing for murder an innocent but throughly corrupt businessman in order to protect his ex-lover's daughter (who had killed her stepfather in self-defence). As in *Les Fleurs du mal*, the audience is placed in a position to empathise with these 'murderers' who are the victims of abusive and corrupt patriarchal figures.

The opening sequence in *Inspecteur Lavardin* shows a close-up on Raoul Mons, a respected Catholic writer and bourgeois, who will later be found murdered with the word pig written on his naked body. The rest of the film will set out to show that the Mons family is nothing but an act, a performance, a parody in which every single member is lying and living separate lives: Raoul is a depraved hypocrite involved in sex parties and drug trafficking with Max, the owner of a night-club; Hélène (Bernadette Lafont) only agreed to marry him for his money but she is still mourning her previous husband; Claude (Michel Piccoli), her brother, is a leech who lives at Raoul's expenses. As for Véronique, Hélène's daughter from her first marriage – a shy, outwardly perfect teenager –, she will actually hide from her mother some pretty dark secrets (as we saw in Chapter 3, young girls are rarely innocent in Chabrol's films): with the complicity of her uncle Claude (Michel Piccoli), she regularly goes out at night to meet her real father (who supposedly died in a boating accident five years earlier but has in fact eloped with his lover, Claude's wife) and she is about to kill Raoul Mons, her stepfather (who tries to blackmail and rape her).

A full circle is reached at the end of the film when Lavardin brandishes the photo of his own family (a woman and two young children) as a perfect excuse to leave (Hélène) and

return to his life. As he confesses to his assistant, far from being his wife and children, the photo was taken from a police file and shows a child murderer with the two children whom she killed. Family, from the beginning to the end of the film, is shown as a sham, an invention, an act. In *Inspecteur Lavardin*, as Austin notes, Lavardin 'makes a second appearance as a surrogate father'.[13] After protecting the young Louis Cuno from prosecution for murder in *Poulet au vinaigre*, in the sequel he is personally drawn into the intricate family plot given that the widow turns out to be his long-lost lover. Once he has discovered the truth, Lavardin decides to absolve his surrogate daughter and her uncle. As Austin put it, in this sense, Lavardin comes 'to represent *la loi du père*, the power of the patriarchal law'.[14]

Both films also explore various forms and manifestations of madness and very few characters seem to be spared. In *Poulet au vinaigre*, Mme Cuno (Stéphane Audran) is a fake invalid and emotionally-abusive mother whose life is dedicated to the memory of the husband who left her and their son Louis. Dr Morasseau (Jean Topart, in a stunning performance of controlled but raging lunacy), who murdered both his wife and her friend, develops an obsession for the statues displayed in his garden/park. He performs strange little dances around the statues at night, looking like a disjointed automaton (he reminds Richard in *A Double tour*). It would therefore seem rather ironic that he should be the one scribbling compulsively the word 'dingue' ['crazy'] when Lavardin comes to visit him at his medical practice. But this might after all be an accurate diagnosis from the doctor as there are clues that Lavardin himself is not a model of mental equilibrium: see, in *Inspecteur Lavardin*, the brief shot showing him obsessively unpacking and arranging dozens of tubes of toothpaste on a bathroom shelf. As Pierre Murat pointed out in his review of *Poulet au vinaigre*, Chabrol continues focusing, as he did in *Le Boucher*, *La Femme infidèle*, *Les Noces rouges* and *Juste avant la nuit*, on 'le dérèglement, la naissance de la déraison' ['malfunctions; the appearance of lunacy']; and his conclusion (which could as well be applied to *Inspecteur Lavardin*) is

'tous sont cinglés' ['they are all crazy'].[15] Beyond its obvious satirical and comic dimension (and a scathing perspective on French provincial life: the so-called pillars of society are the worst lunatics), the motif of madness also participates in and reinforces the discrete but distinct Gothic streak that runs through both films (and will feature, even more prominently, in later films such as *La Demoiselle d'honneur*).

One could for instance see a discreet nod to *Rebecca* through Hélène, a distant, ghost-like character (the views on the beach, the rocks and the staircase leading to the sea, as well as the reference to the capsized boat, do remind *Rebecca*). This 'diffuse Gothic' allows Chabrol to derealize and opacify his otherwise generically classic *polars*/thrillers. Because of these cracks in the realistic representation, *Poulet au vinaigre* and *Inspecteur Lavardin* are much deeper, more complex films than most reviews credit them for, which describes them as enjoyable, well-made or 'delicious' offerings from Chabrol.[16] Ghosts (as key marker of the Gothic) abound: there are missing fathers in both films and, as above-mentioned, Hélène/Bernadette Lafont seems unable to overcome the disappearance of her first husband; she is a mere shadow throughout *Inspecteur Lavardin*. Recurrent shots filmed behind a window show her seemingly trapped in a glass cage: a visual metaphor of entrapment that reflects the fact she cannot escape her past. These shots are examples of the 'plan-aquarium'[17] that Chabrol resorts to now and then in order to provide a filter over the diegetic reality and facilitate a more fragmented, multi-layered interpreting grid.

The (bourgeois) mother is not spared either (Mme Cuno in *Poulet of Vinaigre*). As a key member of Chabrol's social comedy, the matriarch also appears under the guise of the evil stepmother: see for instance Mme Etamble (Christiane Minazzoli) in *Betty* or Geneviève Gaudens (Caroline Sihol) in *La Fille coupée en deux*. Both are manipulative, heartless, fossilized female characters who are obsessed with appearances, social status and a general sense of decorum. These *marâtres bourgeoises* lie at the crossroad of the fairy-tale (with the

nasty stepmother/witch) and the political manifesto : they belong to the *haute-bourgeoisie* and look down on daughters-in-law coming from lower social backgrounds. As such they are prime targets for Chabrol's satirical lens.

On the whole, Chabrol presents us with a sinister, fragmented portrayal of the family, which will only be confirmed and reinforced in the next two chapters through the study of *Une partie de plaisir* and *L'Enfer*. Many families who maintain the appearance of happiness or stability through carefully-constructed rituals are torn apart by the end of the film (*Merci pour le chocolat; Juste avant la nuit*; *La Fleur du mal*). Beyond the satirical denunciation of the bourgeoisie and its hypocrisy lies a deep-rooted suspicion of the family unit. This is perhaps ironic given that Chabrol himself was extremely close to his own family and children from different marriages (many of whom worked on set with him) and employed for years or decades at a time the same team of technicians, who were like another family for him: Jean Rabier or Eduardo Serra (photography), Pierre Jansen (music), Monique Fardoulis (editing), Jean-Bernard Thomasson (sound), Michel Thiriet (cameraman), to give but a few examples. The figure of the patriarch (or its female avatar, the evil stepmother of the fairy-tale) is systematically cast in a dark light. The bad fathers/stepfathers are in the line of fire (*La Fleur du mal*; *Que la bête meure*; *Inspecteur Lavardin*; *La Couleur du mensonge*...) and, beyond them, the society that acts as their guarantor. The Chabrolean Family is a highly toxic environment in which incest, secrets, forbidden desires and murder swarm, thereby providing ideal breeding grounds for the director to observe and dissect human pathologies. Like the Surrealists before him, Chabrol is interested in exploring and deconstructing 'The hideous vipers' knot of blood connections'.[18]

[1] As Neupert points out, 'the first child is referred to more frequently as Glomaud's and Yvonne's than as Serge's', p. 139.

[2] **Pagination**. As Neupert pointed out in *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, the atmosphere of entrapment and circularity is reinforced by the narrative structure and film techniques, in particular by the use of circular pans, p. 137.

[3] Yakir, 'The Magical Mystery World of Claude Chabrol', p.8.

[4] **Pagination.**

[5] *La Fleur du mal*, DVD supplement.

[6] Laubriet, *L'intelligence de l'art chez* Balzac, p. 57.

[7] *La Demoiselle d'honneur*, DVD supplement. 'Un penchant pour le déséquilibre'.

[8] Pierre Laubriet, *L'intelligence de l'art chez Balzac*, p. 57.

[9] Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 211.

[10] As already mentioned, Magritte was one of Chabrol's favourite painters. See **pagination**.

[11] However, unlike Audran in *La Femme infidèle*, Bonnaire's character does not have a full-fledged affair, just a fling with the writer, who quickly proves to be disappointing.

[12] The *trompe-l'œil* is a recurrent diegetic motif in *Au cœur du mensonge*: the writer bumps into René's *trompe-l'œil* painting, in the dark for a comic dose of absurd, and hurts himself – a first sign of the power shift between him and René.

[13] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 104.

[14] *Ibid*., p. 105.

[15] *Télérama*, 10 avril 1985. Quoted in Michel Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 115.

[16] Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 115.

[17] **Pagination.**

[18] See Paul Eluard's poem, inspired by Violette Nozière, **pagination**.

## Chapter 5: Chabrolean spaces as heterotopias of crisis

Far from functioning on a purely realistic mode, Chabrolean spaces are key loci in which inner conflicts and tensions often acquire a symbolic dimension. Houses or functional buildings (schools, hospitals) become places in which generic battles take place and the real and the virtual come to a head. The respectable bourgeois house can seamlessly turn into a doll-house or a stage (*Que la bête meure*; *Juste avant la nuit*), a Gothic mansion (*La Demoiselle d'honneur*), a crime scene (*Violette Nozière*; *La Fleur du mal*; *Poulet au vinaigre*), a timeless temple (the hospital in *Le Boucher*) or a cave (*La Demoiselle d'honneur*). Foucault's concept of heterotopia, as formulated in 'Des espaces autres'/'Of Other Spaces',[1] will be particularly useful to approach these highly unstable Chabrolean topographies. The term, coined in 1966 within his preface to *Les Mots et les choses*, was fully developed a year later, in March 1967, when Foucault gave a presentation at the *Cercle d'études architecturales*. Foucault was said to have been reluctant to publish the lecture at the time and the transcript of 'Des espaces autres', only appeared in 1984, in the architectural journal *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*. Although it originates from and has specific applications for the Social Sciences, the concept has had a significant impact on the Humanities in general and is of particular relevance to Visual and Film Studies in that it helps rethink the various representations of space(s).

According to Foucault, 'the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible';[2] its role 'is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory'.[3] How can this definition of a 'space of illusion' be applied to cinema which is, by itself, a kind of heterotopia that creates multiple illusory worlds onto a

flat screen ? There is indeed right from the beginning a *mise-en-abyme* effect and the notion of heterotopia within a cinematic context should pay particular attention to what is meant exactly by ‘reality’ and ‘illusion’. Identifying heterotopias on screen will by definition attract the attention on form / on the filmic medium in a self-reflexive move. The status of the ‘real’ will therefore be questioned twice. As we have seen, such questioning is very much at stake in Chabrol’s cinema: the blurring of the border between the actual (or the ‘real’) and the illusory, as both a strategy to reveal the complexity of the human condition and explore the potential of the cinematic image, is a constant preoccupation of his.

Foucault’s concept of heterotopia will be used in close conversation with Deleuze’s concept of ‘crystal-image’ and, in this respect, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 should be seen as a diptych. Although Foucault’s article does not engage with cinema or the film image as a specific object, we shall see how Deleuze’s definition of the crystal-image echoes and complements what Foucault tells us about the mirror as heterotopia. Whilst Foucault primarily focuses on *space* and how different, incompatible spaces can coexist and create a space of illusion, Deleuze examines the cinematic image from the perspective of *time* and shows how different layers of time or temporalities can be contained in it (the Deleuzian crystal-image corresponds to what Foucault terms an heterochrony). Both approaches or processes are deeply complementary and will ultimately be used in conjunction to show how Chabrol builds up ‘an illusory space-time by juxtaposing in a single image several spaces and several times, that are in themselves incompatible'. And, to continue paraphrasing and broadening Foucault’s definition (and apply it to the cinematic medium), we shall see that the role of this image is ultimetaly to ‘create a space *and a time* of illusion that exposes diegetic space *and time* as still more illusory’.

As it is neither possible nor desirable to list all the heterotopias or spaces in which the process of transformation identified by Foucault occurs, we shall concentrate on a few

striking examples in order to provide insights into the fluid and complex nature of the confrontation between the real and the illusory, the realistic and the symbolic, that lies at the heart of Chabrol's cinema. The symbolical treatment of the hospital space in *Le Boucher* can spring to mind as a key example of heterotopia. Briefly, as we already focussed on this aspect in Chapter 2 to show how the thriller genre can suddenly flicker,[4] let us remind that the white, eerie hospital in which Hélène arrives with dying Popaul at the end of the film stands in sharp contrast with the realistic anchoring of spaces and locations that characterizes the first part of the film. We are very far indeed from 1960ies Dordogne as we enter a parallel realm where images are saturated with symbols (red lift button). The hospital is a space in which are juxtaposed 'several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible',[5] namely a hospital, a spaceship (intertextual reference to Kubrick's *2001 A Space Odyssey*) and a (modern) cave.[6] And the hospital does fulfil the heterotopia's function 'to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory':[7] through the highly coded handling of space and objects, the viewer is encouraged to reflect with Hélène on the meaning of violence, civilisation and what being human truly means. The use of the hospital as heterotopia (and heterochrony – in particular through the spaceship reference) allows Chabrol to unveil civilisation as a mere illusion.

The following examples of heterotopias, from the boarding house and the park in *La Rupture*, to the glass house in *Juste avant la nuit*, to Violette Nozière's secret rooms and Senta's 'cave' in *La Demoiselle d'honneur* will help us understand how Chabrol's 'spaces of illusion' contribute to his aesthetics of opacity.

### *La Rupture*: the boarding house and the park as heterotopias

*La Rupture* is possibly one of Chabrol's most subtle, sophisticated and underrated films. Based on a novel entitled *The Balloon Man* by American writer Charlotte Armstrong (whom Chabrol was to adapt again in *Merci pour le chocolat*), it tells the story of a courageous working-class woman (Stéphane Audran) trying to protect her son from an abusive, mad husband and fighting her very wealthy and machiavelian (bourgeois) father-in-law (Michel Bouquet) in order to keep custody of her son. Pure melodramatic yarn, it would seem. However, *La Rupture* is a multilayered, slippery film that draws on a few genres[8] and constantly plays with the boundaries of the real and the illusory. The film is certainly closest to the melodrama in that it focuses on the family, on moral values and on a (female) victim. As Hayward put it, 'the melodrama focuses on the victim. The earliest scenarios staged persecuted innocence and the drive to identify the good and the evil'.[9] Indeed, Hélène, the main protagonist and victim of her evil father-in-law's machinations, is a rare example of a thoroughly positive and 'pure', character in Chabrol's filmography: Paul Thomas, the man hired by the father-in-law to ruin her reputation, tells his employer that she is as pure as snow. And 'as in early melodrama', notes Austin, 'doubling is a key theme' in *La Rupture*: as opposed to good, pure Hélène, Paul's girlfriend Sonia functions as a bad, perverted, sexualised Hélène's double.[10]

There is an interesting twist on the 'female melodrama', as identified by Laura Mulvey[11], in the sense that the female protagonist 'wins' in the end: the mad husband is dead, killed by the man working for her father-in-law, and the latter's hope of securing his grandson's custody by smearing Hélène/Audran have vanished. Hélène not only manages to defeat the patriarchal system, but it is her perspective that prevails throughout and she is an active agent in her own victory (as opposed to merely passive and rescued by a male protagonist – her lawyer, who partially fulfils this role, is relegated to the background). Although *La Rupture*, as most melodramas, deals with class struggle, it also seeks to

reincorporate the 'tragic vision' that Peter Brooks had deemed incompatible with the genre. Indeed, according to him, with the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a class, 'the ethical imperative replaces the tragic vision' in the melodrama.[12] However, the 'tragic' does pervade the whole film, from the epigraph (a quotation from Racine's *Andromaque*,'Mais quelle épaisse nuit tout d'un coup m'environne ?' ['But what thick night suddenly surrounds me ?'] (Act V, Scene 5), that could in fact be applied to a number of Chabrol's films, not least *Le Boucher* and *Juste avant la nuit*), to the mythological presence of the Parcae-like[13] women playing cards at the boarding house, who provide a strong sense of destiny, to the allegorical dimension of the fight of good against evil. As Jacques Siclier noted in a review of the film: 'La dernière demi-heure du film est d'une prodigieuse intensité tragique. Après avoir désamorcé le piège qu'elle a pressenti, Hélène y retombe pour une ultime épreuve' ['The last half hour of the film is of incredibly tragic intensity. After managing to avoid the trap, Hélène falls into it again for an ultimate test'].[14] The 'tragic' dimension allows Chabrol to raise the stakes of the melodrama, so to say, by veering away from any realistic anchoring and venturing into the realm of the symbolic.

In Chabrol's own brand of 'magic realism', *La Rupture* is also strongly influenced by the fairy-tale.[15] Markers of this literary genre include the following : Hélène is portrayed throughout the film as a caring, beautiful princess or good fairy who always talks very softly and kindly to Elise, the Pinelli's mentally disabled daughter, in spite of her own worries; in the tradition of the evil witch, Paul Thomas (the father-in-law's envoy) gives Elise 'poisoned' sweets (containing drugs) and, in a desperate attempt to prevent Hélène from going to the airport, offers her one of these very sweets – he will then successfully lace Hélène's orange juice with drugs ; the three tarrot-playing ladies or Parcae living at the pension are cast as benevolent godmothers of fairies who help Hélène in the end. As for Michel Bouquet, dressed from head to toe in black when he goes to visit his grandson at the hospital, he is the

incarnation of pure evil, a fantômas-like figure who, not unlike either the evil stepmother or the ogre of the fairy tale, seeks to destroy the innocent in his megalomanic attempt to possess and control the world around him.

However, because the diegetic world is full of a sense of both magic and menace, there are fluid characters who are at first difficult to decipher: for instance, it in unclear at the beginning whether the balloon man and the 'Parcae' are good or evil. The balloon man, without being *per se* a generic marker of the fairy tale, definitely adds a touch of surreal or 'magic' : an eerie music underlines each of his dream-like appearances in the park, as if to stress the fact that he belongs in the realm of the symbolic or illusory, and he ultimately is revealed as Hélène's helper or guardian angel (he tells her that she is being followed). The medical staff, in particular, are a real cipher with Chabrol clearly playing with the viewer's expectations. At the hospital, upon learning of her son's injuries, Hélène is provided by a doctor (Dr Blanchard) with a powerful sedative. While a light but ominous extradiegetic music is playing in the background, a series of close-up attract the viewer's attention: four brief snapshots on the doctor's and the nurse's faces, framed together, looking intently at Hélène and two close shots on the nurse's hand holding a white tablet and a glass of water. There is something deeply threatening and claustrauphobic in that scene: we expect that something might happen to Hélène if she swallows the tablet.[16] The objective narrative seems to have dissolved but it is somehow unclear if these are subjective shots from Hélène's perspective. Suspicion is cast on the whole diegetic world, leading the viewer to a certain sense of paranoia, especially when another shot shows Hélène fainting and leaning against the same doctor's shoulder (an effect of the sedative, we are led to believe), while he exchanges seemingly conspiratorial glances with the receptionist. Hélène's face is framed on one side by the doctor's face and on the other side of the screen by the receptionist's white coat, making it very clear that we are not dealing with a subjective shot filtered through

Hélène's distorted perspective. If the metaphor of entrapment and danger is obvious, its purpose is more difficult to grasp. Indeed, this seems to be a mere red herring planted by Chabrol: whereas we are strongly encouraged by the camera to wonder whether the doctor and the nurse are part of the conspiracy against Audran, they turn out to be harmless, benevolent characters who only seek to help Hélène in the overall diegesis.[17] In this respect, *La Rupture* could easily be referred to as a 'paranoid woman's film': although different from the meaning originally assigned to it by Doane,[18] who applied the phrase to the gothic woman's films' of the 1940s (such as *Rebecca*) in which the main female character starts suspecting her husband of nurturing evil intentions, the paranoid camera angles, often in conjunction with the eerie music, contaminate the whole narrative in *La Rupture* (and, as we are about to see, there is also a 'Gothic' quality to the Pinelli house or *pension de famille*). By doing so, they pave the way for the appearances of two heterotopias: the *pension* first and the park.

Significantly, it is the same doctor Blanchard who introduces Hélène/Audran to that *pension de famille*. He literally drags her there[19] while an ominous music emphasises the symbolical, metaphorical dimension of the journey: we are given to understand that Hélène is being taken to a very special place. This first shot of the Pinelli boarding house is crucial: the eerie, slightly menacing music enhances the Gothic quality of the seemingly uninhabited house. The blurry pan along the metal gate allows us to see that the property is for sale – it will be made clear later that it is due to be demolished. It is unclear whether this first shot of the boarding house is subjective or not: is the dream-like quality of the house entirely justified, diegetically, by Hélène's distorted, sedative-induced state? Or is it rather an 'objective' dream-image (or 'crystal-image' as Deleuze puts it)? The latter is more likely: indeed, from that moment onwards, and well after the effect of the sedative has stopped

working, the eerie external music will almost always accompanies external shots of the property and 'reality' and illusion will never stop mingling.

The *pension de famille* is one of those mysterious, liminal Chabrolean places that are at the very heart of the negotiation or encounter between the real and the dream/the virtual (and also, as it turns out, between forces of good and evil). Beyond the possible Balzacian reference (to the pension Vauquer), the outdated boarding house corresponds to one of these 'other spaces' or heterotopias identified by Foucault, that are 'capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'. From the outside, the choice of camera angles (such as high-angle shots and slow tracking shots) makes it look like an abandoned, eerie building (similar in many ways to the 'Gothic' house in which the young postman lives with his disabled mother in *Poulet au vinaigre* or to Senta's house in *La Demoiselle d'honneur*).[20] The fact that it is about to be bought by one of Hélène's father-in-law's companies does nothing to lift the veil of menace that pervades the place. It is also inhabited by ill-assorted, incongruous characters: Mme Pinelli, her alcooholic husband and their disabled child; an outrageous but kind actor; the doctor; and the three old women or Parcae who spend their time playing tarrot cards. Albeit ambivalent, the boarding house is a shelter from which Hélène tries to weather the crisis and organise her fight against bourgeois patriarchy. As such, the *pension* fits Foucault's definition of the heterotopia of crisis as 'the privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis'.[21] It is primarily a space of illusion or a fantasmatic space that seems completely cut off from the space-time of 1960ies urban France (outdated interior and objects). And indeed, as Foucault pointed out, 'heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies'. Anything can happen in this heterochronic illusory space, including the forbidden, the murder of Charles,

that could not take place earlier in the family home. The murder itself is represented in a very theatrical way and, once he has performed it, Paul Thomas vanishes as through a magic trick of sorts: see the shot in which he slowly steps back, goes offscreen (only remaining visible as a reflection/ghost in the mirror) and disappears yet again, this time completely, as if swallowed in by the mirror. Given that the mirror itself functions as a heterotopia,[22] we have a dizzying visual *mise en abyme*: the *pension* can be said to comprise of embedded layers of space/time. It is therefore not surprising that Paul is caught into a time/space warp. It looks as though he has only ever been an illusion, a bad dream who can now disappear from Hélène's life. The next shot shows the three Parcae and Hélène frozen in a pause, looking like statues standing next to Charles' body. Once more Chabrol casts suspicion over the reality of his characters: are they all mere automatons evolving in this 'other space', in spite of Hélène's earlier and puzzling assertion to Paul ('Je ne suis pas un automate' ['I'm not an automaton']?

All the sequences focusing on the park are similarly de-realized: the extradiegetic eerie music that is heard in both locations emphasises the connections between the pension and the park and encourages the viewer to perceive them as similarly charged, highly symbolical places. What would be, without the music, a perfectly innocuous and banal town park suddenly becomes a space tinged with ominous connotations and a sense of urgency: something decisive might happen (to Hélène) there: namely the encounter with the balloon man. Significantly, Hélène only goes to the park after having settled in the pension, as if the internal space granted her access to the external, even more ambivalent space. According to Foucault, 'perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopias that take the form of contradictory sites is the garden'. He reminds that in the Orient the garden 'had very deep and seemingly superimposed meanings'.[23] Although very different from an Oriental garden, the public park in *La Rupture* is also a site of superimposed meanings and realities. The park

sequences function as cracks in the representation of the diegetic reality: they are presented as hallucinatory, dream-images marked by the magical presence of the balloon man. Hélène has to fully embrace the strangeness and ambivalence of those heterotopias, and of the characters that inhabit them, in order to be able to go/see beyond appearances and overcome obstacles.

From the moment when Hélène drinks the drug-laced orange juice, the film fully descends into the realm of the oneiric, which had so far been glimpsed essentially through some shots of the *pension* and the park sequences. Significantly, this sequence unfolds in the two heterotopias that we have identified, the *pension* and the park, which seem deeply interconnected and merge in the last shot. It becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the dream or illusion from the 'reality' and this blurring is not solely justified by Hélène's psychedelic hallucinations (although the extremely blurry shots showing the shadow of the balloon man as a kind of saviour, or 'God' as Hélène calls him, are clearly subjective shots). The whole sequence seems to have been contaminated by the dream state that allows Hélène to see beyond appearances; it is only then that she undertands the true nature of the Parcae and the balloon man as protectors: the magical, mythological world has been unveiled as the 'real' one. These two overcoded locations (the boarding house and the park) somehow turn into one at the very end when, from the garden of the *pension*, Hélène sees the balloons (key markers of the park) flying in the sky. As is typical of Chabrol, we are left with a very open-ended last (few) shot(s): are the balloons a symbol of Hélène's new-found freedom (from both her husband and the machinations of her father-in-law)? Could it be that the balloons as 'angels' and the park as a space of reflection and interactions between different worlds are no longer needed? Is it an ultimate dream-image, seen by Hélène only, thats marks the end of her psychedelic dream or was it all a dream?

Much more overtly than in *Le Boucher*, in the well-named *La Rupture* Chabrol continues creating heterotopias that challenge clearly-delineated, genre-based approaches of

spectatorship by exploring the visual dialectics of the real and the virtual. The *pension* and the park are key spaces of illusion that shatter the melodrama from within and, in Foucault's words '[expose] every real space [or diegetic in our case], all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory'.[24]

### *Juste avant la nuit* (1971) *:* the crystal house as mousetrap

*Juste avant la nuit* displays striking similarities with *La Femme infidèle* (1968): we find the same Charles/Hélène bourgeois couple, also played by Michel Bouquet/Stéphane Audran, living in a big property in Versailles. These are outwardly happy families with children (*Juste avant la nuit*) or a child (*La Femme infidèle*), and Charles' mother as a regular visitor. Similar 'dolls' but different game, and different doll-house, as we shall see. Unlike *La Femme infidèle, Juste avant la nuit* is a kind of rewriting of *Crime and Punishment*, with strong Hitchcockian echoes as well, through the moral dilemna and the Christian sense of guilt that tears the main character Charles apart. Charles is having a wild, sado-masochistic affair with his best friend François' wife Laura when, overcome by a sudden fit of madness, he ends up strangling her. The first shot of Charles, just before the murder, is a striking close-up that shows him head down in profile. It is located on the left on the screen, while the other two-thirds of the screen are entirely black and a haunting extradiegetic music plays in the background: right from the beginning, Chabrol efficiently implies that the character is prey to inner demons. The dark part of the screen dissolves to be replaced by Laura's naked body slowly coming into focus. She starts taunting Charles to play games with her, pretending that he is a stranger who is going to strangle her. A blurring of the borders between game and reality occurs when Charles actually strangles her to death. Strangulation is a recurrent act of violence against women in Chabrol's films (see for instance *Les Bonnes Femmes* and *Les*

*Fantômes du chapelier*): as ever, the director is interested in investigating pathological behaviours and, in particular, the effects/ workings of sexual perversity.

What Chabrol had identified in his article on 'Hitchcock devant le mal' as a key Hitchcockian feature applies perfectly to *Juste avant la nuit*: 'C'est en [l'homme], sur son propre terrain, que se livre la bataille [avec le mal], c'est à lui de vaincre ou de sombrer' ['It is within human beings, on their own ground, that the battle against evil takes place; it is for them to overcome or surrender'].[25] Incongruously, when Charles eventually confesses to his wife and François, they do not hold any grudge against him, neither for the affair nor the murder. On the contrary, they readily take the whole thing in their stride (a striking backward tracking shot that frames Charles and François walking towards the camera during the confession emphasises the absolute lack of emotion on François' part) and are keen for life to continue as normal. In fact, there are strong parallels here with Varda's *Le Bonheur* : like the husband in Varda's film (also named François: mere coincidence?), François is ready to go to any length in order to preserve the 'happiness' of the bourgeois family (that is the appearance of happiness, or happiness as a construct, as a cliché).[26] Just like the character of Thérèse in *Le Bonheur*, François' wife Laura seems to be entirely disposable and is easily forgotten by her husband.[27] Faced with such puzzling acceptance, Charles' torments only increase until the moment, in the end, when he cannot cope anymore. He then urges his wife to give him a lethal dosage of laudanum, in a fitting and somewhat ironic symmetry with the beginning (in which his mistress taunted him into strangling her).

But it is the glass house in which Charles lives with his wife, Helen, his two children and their nanny, that somehow occupies centre stage in *Juste avant la nuit*. This avant-garde house was built by Charles' architect friend, François, who recalls during a dinner that Charles had pushed him outside his comfort zone by requesting a thoroughly modern house. According to Charles' theory, 'un peu d'avant-garde évite la sclérose' ['a touch of avant-

garde prevents sclerosis'] and the structure and inner organization of the house were supposed to keep away the boredom of bourgeois life. Apparently, this is the ideal house for a picture-perfect family (see the Christmas scene with the tree and presents), very different from François' childless house whose prison-like gates make it an unhospitable space. But this open plan, transparent house is in stark contrast with Charles' secrets and his thoughts, which become darker and darker (his wild affair proved too much to handle for the bourgeois hater that he cast himself as and, as we saw, resulted in murder).

The house does functions as a heterotopia that creates 'a space of illusion that exposes every real space [...] as still more illusory'.[28] The numerous curtains and partitions emphasise the stage-like quality of the house: as Austin put it, 'the theatrical metaphor is reiterated by the *mise en scène* throughout the film, which features the repeated use of curtains, walls or doors to frame the action'.[29] Charles' affair with Laura was described by the former as 'une sorte de théâtre insensé' ['a kind of mad theatre'] (and it unfolded onto a completely different, opposite stage, behind closed shutters, inside Laura's appartment in Paris) but the family life and setting are no less unreal and theatrical. Both family life and relationships are exposed as mere illusion or play-acting. And throughout the film, the mousetrap is another recurrent visual metaphor grafted upon the theatrical one. A rat is heard scuttling across the house right on the night after the murder. But the presence of a rat / tainted character in this too transparent, clean and perfect house is unbearable: the rat must die. And the montage clearly equates Charles with a rat which can't escape. Right after the setting of the actual mousetrap, a metaphorical shot shows Charles going through a door within his own house, that is within his own glass trap. When the rat is caught, the jump-cut is followed by a shot picturing a startled Charles jumping from his sofa, as if he were waking up from a bad, proleptic dream. By extension, the mousetrap also becomes a metaphor for the viewer, who is

trapped inside Charles' visually-beautiful nightmare and struggles to identify its contours and decipher its significance.

The glass house reinforces the blurry, dream-like atmosphere that embues the whole film right from the beginning: where does the 'real'/actual stop and the imaginary/illusion begin? Are we in Charles' nightmare? Everything (spaces and characters alike) looks warped, unreal; the dialogues often seem to obey the (lack of) logic of dreams: Hélène and François don't even bat an eyelid during Charles' confession of murder. And during the final scene, Hélène and Charles's elliptical dialogue evokes the reciting of memorised lines. Hélène looks hypnotised by Charles (the close-up on her enigmatic, mask-like face strongly reminds some of the close-ups on Hélène the schoolteacher at the end of *Le Boucher*). As soon as he pronunces the magic, poetic words 'Donne-moi de quoi dormir, donne-moi de quoi dormir' (an alexandrine) ['Give me something to make me sleep; give me something to make me sleep'], the white, blurry, ghost-like Hélène proceeds to the bathroom in order to prepare the lethal drink. The ambivalence of this last act (assisted suicide/murder) is reflected in the *mise en scène*: the key shot in which Hélène pours the drops into the glass is partly framed within the mirror, as if it were happening in an alternative reality. In a system of echoes or *mise en abyme*, it mirrors the shot in which Charles goes to the bathroom in the café, right after the murder, and puts dark glasses on. Both shots are constructed very similarly: the characters are first seized as reflections, before appearing 'in person', thereby casting suspicion onto the viewer's perception. Besides stressing the fragmentation of the character's identity in moments of crisis, such shots emphasise the fact that appearances are slippery and deceptive: how to tell the difference between the real and the reflection/the illusion in these conditions? Significantly, right after this first mirror scene featuring Charles, François appears out of nowhere in the café (we hear his voice before seeing him), as if he were himself an illusion, a mere projection of Charles' tortured mind.[30] This type of dizzying pan is a perfect example of

the Chabrolean's 'crystal-image' which will be analysed in detail in the next chapter. It is one of Chabrol's most efficient tools in his thorough exploration of the relationship between illusion and reality.

A little bit as in Cortazar's short-story 'The night face-up',[31] it becomes impossible to disentangle nightmare/illusion from reality in *Juste avant la nuit*. Chabrol carefully preserves the ambivalence by inserting clues pointing to the unstable quality of the characters' 'reality'. François tells Charles, during the latter's confession, 'On n'est pas coupable de ce qui se passe dans un cauchemar' ['One is not responsible for what happens in a nightmare']. And when Charles recalls in detail the sequence of the murder during his confession to Hélène, he says: 'A un moment j'ai dû passer une frontière entre l'imaginaire et le réel' ['At some point I must have crossed the border between the imaginary and the real']. As Chabrol admitted:

> La virtualité des choses est une notion qui m'intéresse beaucoup. Le 'Qu'est-ce qui se passerait si...?' J'ai même fait des films entiers sur cette idée, mais personne ne s'est aperçu de la différence avec mes autres films.[32]
>
> [The virtuality of things is a notion that is of great interest to me. The question of 'What would happen if...?'. I have even made entire films based on this idea but no-one noticed the difference with my other films].

*Juste avant la nuit* may very well be one such film. Ultimately, it is deeply reflexive. And Chabrol inserts some micro *mises en abyme* which enhance even further this reflexive texture: see the playful allusion to guilt and evil through the advert that Charles, an advertising executive, has produced for a washing powder named Culpa ('Culpa, la lessive qui extirpe le mal d'où il se trouve' ['Culpa, the washing powder that extracts evil from

where it is to be found']). Chabrol often resorts to this device in his films – one can think for instance of Why's drawing of a pregnant doe, thereby echoing the *Biches* of the title. Through the use of the theatrical metaphor and the persistent blurring of illusion and reality, *Juste avant la nuit* provides a subtle exploration of spectatorship; it challenges the viewers' expectations and makes them question the significance of what they are seeing.

In ***Une partie de plaisir***, the big bourgeois house in which Philippe, Esther and their daughter live happily at the beginning of the film, also undergoes a transformation and seems to acquire, towards the end of the film, a fantastic, oneiric dimension which jeopardizes its status or, at least, makes the spectator question it. *Une partie de plaisir*, based on a screenplay by Paul Gégauff, is the dark and twisted story of the unravelling of a family played by Gégauff himself, his ex-wife and his daughter. As a genre, it belongs to the melodrama more than to the thriller and Esther's murder is, in many respects, the chronicle of a death foretold. It is a difficult, at times unpleasant, film to watch given the arrogant, misogynistic and violent nature of the main character. Chabrol explores, almost to breaking point, the full spectrum of emotions that such a character might trigger in the audience. Indeed, it is particularly hard for the viewer to reconcile the image of the good, patient, loving father (on which, provocatively, the film ends) with the bad husband's. Unlike Popaul from *Le Boucher* – whose acts of violence are never shown on screen, thereby preverving his sympathetic capital, so to say –, the manipulative nature of Gégauff's character and the brutality of Esther's on-screen murder make the viewing process disturbing. The multi-faceted monster is lurking beneath the mask of the tender, sweet father and would-be loving husband and the family's implosion has never been as powerful nor subversive as in *Une Partie de plaisir* (in *La Rupture*, for instance, the characterization is much more clear-cut and distanced: the violent father/husband is inequivocally bad from the beginning).

With its ironic title and opening credits (bright opening yellow colours and idyllic scenes of a happy family on an outing), *Une partie de plaisir* seems to reference Varda's *Le Bonheur* (and the fact that Jean Rabier acted as director of photography in both films is probably no coincidence here). The most obvious link lies in the careful construction of a family outing before and after the implosion of the family unit, just as in Varda's film. But, whereas in *Le Bonheur* François's first wife seems to be completely forgotten, and has been smoothly and effortlessly replaced by another woman (see the ending), in Chabrol's film, Philippe's trip to the sea with his new wife acts as a catalyst: the place in which he was happy many years before has lost its charm for him; it suddenly dawns on him that he will not be able to forget his first wife, hence his shaken looks. His own version of 'happiness' lies in an idealized past that he is becoming obsessed with, a past when he lived in a big bourgeois house and garden with his wife and daughter, before moving to Paris. He wants to recreate this previous life at all costs – he repeatedly tries to use the daughter as a go-between in an attempt for a reconciliation and Esther's murder only occurs when Philippe realizes that she will never come back and he won't be able to recreate the family bubble. Right after the key sequence by the sea, the main character tells his new wife Sylvia that he needs to go out to think things through and kisses her goodbye. The next shot, a very slow pan shows an enigmatic night scene: Philippe seems to have driven to the big house where he used to live with Esther and their daughter and starts walking past the windows of a lighted room – a voyeuristic motif, recurrent in Chabrol's films (see *Le Cri du hibou* for instance), that encourages the viewer/voyeur to think of the status of the image they are watching. The house, in spite of a few lit-up rooms, looks strangely quiet, uninhabited, somewhat surreal in the dark (especially after Philippe has exited the field of vision): a shadow might appear, or not, at one of the windows (or is it a curtain moving?), that reinforces the ghostly quality of the image. What is the status of this shot? Is it Philippe's memory, his hallucination or a

subjective shot of the ‘actual’ house from his perspective? When Philippe comes back home, he tells his wife that he went partying and looks very drunk: is he lying? did he go partying after his drive to the house or is the vision of the house a hallucination? As it will in *Violette Nozière* to a much larger extent, the elliptical montage carefully preserves the ambivalence and reflects the character’s fragmented state of mind. The house, presented in some of the opening shots as a typical bourgeois house (reminiscent of the first shot of the house in *La Femme infidèle*, for instance) functions as a heterotopia, a multi-layered space that does not only cast suspicion on the ‘reality’ of the other diegetic spaces but also on the ‘reality’ of the narrative itself. Right after the shot on the house, a close-up on Philippe’s face shows him slowly turning his head from the house to what must be the garden, as if to take in the whole space around him or create it: has he made up his whole previous life in this house? Was his happiness an illusion? What is real?

### ***Violette Nozière*'s secret rooms**

The tiny room located under the staircase in Violette Nozière's building, which functions as her own secret room and the locus of her transformation into a sexualised woman / *femme fatale*, could be defined as a heterotopia in the Foucauldian sense insofar as it ‘[juxtaposes] in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible’:[33] the two Violettes − the one about to go out as a sexually-active woman and the one coming back home as the apparently obedient, virgin daughter − have to 'share' this very limited space (without the mirror, which allows the transformation − see the applying of make-up −, it would actually be a non-space/a worthless space). It is therefore a space of 'otherness', as is the hotel room, and, significantly, mirrors figure prominently in both places.

The room at the Hôtel de la Sorbonne, which is the antithesis of the tiny family space in that it allows dreams, sexual activity and play acting to take place, also functions as a

heterotopia. In that space of illusion, Violette's dreams and fantasies can freely unfold; she gets to create her own identity or identities and the characters who are to play a role in it. For instance, it is implied through the mise en scène and editing that she has quite literally made up or dreamt up the character of Jean. In a proleptic dream, she sees him, Venus-like, rising from the sea, and when she meets the actual Jean at the café a little later, she instantly recognizes him as the man from her dream and, therefore, as her 'dream man'. Like Emma Bovary, Violette falls prey to unattainable Romantic ideals. But the Romantic cliché of the twin souls destined to meet is subverted in a subtle way when the viewer understands at a later stage, thanks to a close-up, that this key dream was triggered by the rather corny picture of a wavy sea hanging in the hotel room. In yet another shot, a reflection of the same picture will be shown in one of the hotel room mirrors, as if to point out that her relationship with Jean is only a treacherous cliché, a 'miroir aux alouettes', which Violette failed to identify as such.

The hotel room fits quite neatly with Foucault's definition of ‘crisis heterotopias’ as one of 'the privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis'.[34] In such a space, Violette can try out various identities as she pleases and she is often inspired by her own reflection to do so: see for instance the shot in which she tells the maid she is a medical student while looking at herself in the mirror – the maid then points out that she was a history student the last time she came, thereby breaking the 'spell of the mirror' and uncovering Violette as a compulsive liar and a mythomaniac. In *Violette Nozière*, heterotopias or ‘other spaces’ ultimately fail to provide Violette with a viable alternative to the ‘prison’ of her parents’ tiny apartment, to society’s constraints and to the real prison, but they contribute to creating a multi-faceted, fragmented portrait of the eponymous character and the society she lives in.

**Gothic spaces: the Cuno's house and the Morasseau's garden in *Poulet au vinaigre*; Senta's 'cave' in *La Demoiselle d'honneur***

The surface realism sometimes cracks up and gives way to a diffuse form of Gothic in Chabrol's films. The Cuno's property in *Poulet au vinaigre* and Senta's house and basement in *La Demoiselle d'honneur* are fine examples of these highly charged, liminal spaces that seem to draw on the Gothic / horror genres (and although Chabrol does not let the Gothic settle in for very long in *Merci pour le chocolat*, the Polonski's isolated mansion, located at the top of a hill and only accessible by a winded road, looks somewhat similar). Indeed, such spaces share a number of the recurrent figures and concerns identified by Punter and Byron in their influential overview of *The Gothic*, including the uncanny, variations on the haunted house or castle, the monster and madness.[35] The large, abandoned-looking house in which the young postman Louis Cuno and his mother live is at the very heart of the plot or, as Austin put it, '*Poulet au vinaigre* is essentially a film about a house':[36] indeed, in order to proceed with their real estate scheme, the corrupt trio of local dignitaries (Filamo) are trying to evict mother and son and it is their failure to do so by legal means that triggers the whole (murderous) chain of events. There are similarities here with the Pinelli house from *La Rupture*: in both cases, the owners of the 'Gothic' house are about to be expropriated by evil bourgeois developers. The mere existence of those liminal, archaic places which constitute an obstacle to modernization and profit is unacceptable to the bourgeoisie.

The Cuno house is represented as an eerie, ramshackle brick-house, surrounded by an unkempt garden and closed by a broken wooden gate and chains; it stands out in the polished provincial town as belonging to a different space-time and the sense of isolation and menace that emanates from it is in some ways reminiscent of Hitchcock's Bates motel (and like the

Bates motel, it harbours a form of psychotic relationship between a mother and a son). Not only does it look like a haunted house, but it is actually inhabited by a ghost, that of Madame Cuno's husband, who left her and their son Louis many years before. A number of performances are enacted in this heterotopia or space of illusion. Firstly, Madame Cuno has refined her role as an invalid to near perfection; she needs to be carried up or down the stairs for meals by her son, thereby ensuring his regular presence and establishing her control over him. Secondly, the basement of the house has been turned into an investigation room in which Mme Cuno and Louis play detective; the viewer is led to believe that they have been investigating for quite some time the dealings of Filamo by opening their mail (see the huge boards on which they pin letters under each name in a parody of a police situation room). Last but not least, as a dedicated shrine to the absent father, the house is the site of other well-rehearsed rituals such as the 'anniversary dinner' for which Mme Cuno prepares a supposedly fancy dinner. She pretends that Louis' father is there and addresses both of them when she says: 'Vous allez vous régaler' ['you will enjoy this']. The stylised shot on mother and son sitting opposite each other emphasises the fact that the absent father or ghost is also assigned a seat and plate, at the head of the table: the very structured, symmetrical *mise en scène* makes the scene all the more disturbing as it reveals the extent of the mother's delusion. But because Louis does not play his part as well as usual – he is more interested in his date with Henriette and becomes increasingly reluctant to go along with his mother's play-acting –, the whole performance goes awry. Mme Cuno ends up lashing out at her son for hating his father and the cruel parody of family falls apart. The Cuno house is represented as a decidedly 'crazy', dysfunctional, overcoded place. Like many 'Gothic' locations in which 'abnormal', deviant practices take place, it ends up in flames: indeed, like many 'madwomen' before her (Bertha in *Jane Eyre*; Mrs Danvers in *Rebecca*...), Madame Cuno/Stéphane Audran, who

feels that her son is escaping her control, sets fire to the place in a half-hearted suicide attempt.

Although Dr Morasseau's elegant, well looked-after bourgeois mansion makes it, at first sight, the very antithesis of the Cuno's decrepit house, it too functions as a Gothic space of illusion (or delusion) in which the diegetic reality is shattered or shown as opaque and multi-layered. At night, the eerie, moon-lit garden filled with white, ghost-like statues, becomes a stage on which a puppet-like Dr Morasseau performs a strange, mad pantomime. He hugs one of the white statues before sobbing uncontrollably, his face covered with white plaster, while Marthe tries to console him (as we learn later, the body of his wife is in fact hidden in the plinth supporting one of the statues). There is a surreal, dream-like, theatrical quality to the scene that allows Chabrol to blur momentarily the line between the real and the illusory. In this night scene, the whole viewing process is problematized or, so to say, under scrutiny. *What* exactly are we witnessing (the scene looks so artificial, so theatrical, is this 'real'? where does Morasseau's 'performance' start and end? is it a true expression of remorse? a manifestation of madness?)? And *who* is witness to this? Unbeknown to Morasseau, there is indeed, if not a exactly crowd, an audience comprising of different levels of voyeurs, some more empowered than others: besides Marthe, Louis and Henriette are spying on the doctor, not knowing themselves that Lavardin is also watching (as we learn later, the former voyeurs soon become subjected to voyeurism themselves when they engage in sex in Morasseau's garden under Lavardin's gaze). This dizzying criss-crossing of gazes functions as a *mise en abyme* of the viewing process, with the extradiegetic viewer's gaze being equated with Lavardin's. Lavardin too, as a seemingly omniscient viewer, can see without being seen, hence his seemingly unlimited diegetic power.

Morasseau's obsession with the statues reflects his shattered mental state and increasingly dimmer grasp on reality. In this sense, the doctor is Mme Cuno's double; he too

is unable to adapt to a life without his spouse and he has gone mad (the fact that he murdered his wife might make the viewer wonder what actually happened to Monsieur Cuno and whether the Cuno house does not hide more secrets or actual skeletons in the closet...). In *Poulet au vinaigre*, these two Gothic heterotopias reveal the extent to which the characters of Mme Cuno and Morasseau are locked within the prison of their illusory worlds / mental illnesses; they are key loci for the exploration and representation, or *performance*, of madness in its various guises. Bubbles of different space-time open up that, by attempting to represent the unrepresentable, raise questions about and cast suspicion on the overall narrative. The paradox carefully put in place by Chabrol is the following: the more theatrical, surreal, artificial the scene looks/the character behaves, the more one seems able to grasp or approach some kind of inner 'truth' (or darkness) about that character. Whilst working within the generic framework of the *policier* (and to a lesser extent than in *La Rupture* or *Juste avant la nuit* in which the thin line between the real and the illusion collapses), such bubbles or cracks in the diegetic reality of *Poulet au vinaigre* allow Chabrol to represent the human as multi-layered, complex, ultimately opaque.

In *La Demoiselle d'honneur*, Senta's house also functions as a Gothic site in which time slows down (longer shots, more fluid takes) and the light acquires a subtle, dark blue quality. Like the Cuno's house, it is a large, abandoned-looking building that can be accessed via a gate and untidy garden. On his first visit to the house, Philippe comments on the general sense of dereliction by making an incongruously realistic remark about the inefficiency of the 'syndic' (property management). And indeed, the realistic texture (very present in Philippe's working-class house) crumbles right away. As if he were in a haunted castle – a key marker of the Gothic as pointed out by David Punter and Glennis Byron –, Philippe feels constantly ill at ease and discovers 'the impossibility of imposing [his] own sense of place on an alien

world'.[37] Senta's house 'represents desubjectification: within its walls one may be "subjected" to a force that is utterly resistant to the individual's attempt to impose his or her own order'.[38] It is a Gothic heterotopia or space of illusion that is itself divided or stratified into distinct areas. The entrance hall, which in typical Gothic fashion contains mirrors,[39] leads to a central area. Although Senta's mother and her younger lover sometimes make a fleeting appearance there (as outmoded, ghost-like characters from another epoch who dance their lives away), this central part looks abandoned with its dusty smell ('odeur de renfermé', according to Philippe) and its furniture covered with sheets. Paintings have been removed from the wall to create a further feeling of neglect and show that the space is anchored in a mysterious past. There is also an attic room, in which a terrible secret is hidden: the mummified body of the missing girl will eventually be discovered there, in a cupboard. The viewer becomes aware of this other space through a subjective bird-eye view shot that the viewer tends to attribute to Senta, although it is never confirmed: the sense of menace conveyed by this Hitchcockian shot attracts for the first time the viewer's attention to the existence of an attic, a secret room which functions as an extension to the basement (it turns out that Senta is quite literally one of these 'madwomen in the attic' identified by Gilbert and Gubar as a trope of nineteenth-century women's writings).[40] And, finally, there is the main space and headquarter of the Gothic, that can only be reached via a dark staircase: Senta's den, a cave-like room which barely lets the daylight in through a narrow basement window. Senta herself is represented as a creature of darkness, a vampire who gives free rein to her voracious sexuality in what she herself calls her 'domain'.[41] The dark, claustrophobic room is filled with slightly incongruous objects (low-hanging chandeliers) that help convey a sense of uncanny. The broken dolls in particular, both the objects (broken heads) and the posters representing the broken face of a doll (with the word 'Poupées' written in big letters), create a feeling of menace and foreboding.[42] They seem to prefigure the discovery of the missing

girl's mummified body wearing Senta's blue bridemaid's dress. As Kristeva pointed out, the corpse is, by definition, 'the utmost of abjection'[43] but there is something even more violent and abject about the representation of Senta's victim: the blue dress alludes to the fact that Senta has been subverting an innocent children's activity; she has been 'playing dolls' with the body of the girl whom she murdered. Senta's act is all the more transgressive and the shot disturbing and shocking.

The expressionist *mise en scène* and the choice of close shots and angles convey unease. As Chabrol said in a interview during the making of the film: 'Tout le principe du film est basé sur une gêne que le spectateur doit ressentir sans jamais exactement savoir d'où elle vient ni pourquoi' ['The guiding principle of the film relies on the feeling of uneasiness that the viewer must experience without knowing exactly where it is coming from nor why'][44] – a perfect definition of the uncanny which, as Nicholas Royle put it, 'involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced'.[45] David Punter and Glennis Byron's comments on films such as *Psycho, Peeping Tom* and *Repulsion,* which draw on the horror genre (which itself has roots in the Gothic), easily apply to *La Demoiselle d'honneur*: '[Each of these films], in the search for a visual equivalent for a psychological state, finds a setting which in the end [...] relates closely to traditional Gothic imagery'.[46]

The multiple mirrors and reflections are also part of a Gothic imagery.[47] Numerous shots filmed in Senta's house are reflected in mirrors as if to underline the liminal, illusory, blurry status of that space and its inhabitants. Even when Senta is at Philippe's, Chabrol was very keen for Senta/Laura Smet to have three eyes in her mirror image (what he called, rather funnily, 'un œil pouêt-pouêt' ['a honk-honk eye']).[48]

**[Insert Image 8. *La Demoiselle d'honneur*]**

This distorted reflection functions as a clue to Senta's monstrous nature: the 'real' easily flickers or dissolves in order to give rise to a three-eyed mythical beast. The long shot/mirror image of Senta lying on her bed in a foetal position after breaking up with Philippe is particularly striking: the dream-like, blurry quality of the image makes it look as though Senta were in a cocoon or womb. Besides the fact that this shot reflects Senta's perturbed state of mind, it further enhances the unstable, heterotopic nature of the basement and encourages the viewer to question its diegetic status.

Philippe is uncomfortable in this underground room, which he finds dark, smelly and repulsive ('Je ne veux pas vivre dans une cave' ['I don't want to live in a cellar']; 'ce trou à rats' ['that rat-hole']) and the lovers' disagreement over the room – a sign that their relationship is doomed – makes perfect sense insofar as it echoes the two distinct worlds they embody: clarity, order and pragmatism for Philippe; darkness, instability and imagination for Senta. However, as mentioned earlier, Philippe is not as alien or disconnected as he first seems to be from Senta's world. After all, one possible reading of the film is that it is he who, through the act of stealing the statue of Flore, has conjured up Senta and unleashed this dark, Gothic story of revenge and repression.[49] The key merit of this infusion of Gothic is twofold: on the one hand, it makes the viewer question the distinction between imagination and diegetic reality and increases their awareness regarding the multiple ways in which apparently classic thrillers can convey different meanings. On the other hand, the more obvious 'Gothic' features help attract the attention on the uncanny that pervades, to different degrees, Chabrol's films and contributes to his aesthetics of opacity.

**The Pyla house in *La Fleur du mal*: the House of Incest as heterotopia and heterochrony (or crystal-image)**

The Pyla house, located near the sea, functions both as what Foucault calls heterotopia and heterochrony. Past and present merge seemlessly in a space which triggers all the memories of Tante Line and allows for the Michèle/François couple to function as a double of the 'couple' that Micheline formed with her own brother François in the past. Symbolically, tante Line is the owner of that space (she hands in the house key to Michèle and François), which is also the place where the 'flower of evil' or incest is allowed to develop and thrive. One very structured and recurrent zooming shot of the narrow lane leading from the house to the beach attracts the viewer's attention. This subjective shot, characterised by a great depth of focus, is filled with a canopy of trees which frames a view on the sea and the beach. This internal framing device emphasises the metaphorical dimension of the shot which, quite literally, through the slow zooming effect, allows tante Line to travel down memory lane. Indeed, this 'corridor' functions as a catalyst or a conduit for her memories of the past. The zooming-in allows both *to travel forward in space and backward in time*; it serves to encapsulate the duality of past and present and the transition is seemless, invisible. Chabrol was very keen on this, who claimed that a 'Kantian notion of time' was at the heart of the film: 'Le temps n'existe que dans le présent' ['Time only exists in the present'].[50] As a symbolically-charged space that facilitates incestuous relationships, the path is a heterotopia and it is linked to a heterochrony, as defined by Foucault in 'Of Other Spaces' ('Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies').[51] But Deleuze's cinematic concept of the 'crystal-image' can also be applied here, which allows to expand and refine considerably Foucault's much more general concept of heterochrony. Indeed, we have here a striking example of a crystal-image, in that this dizzying shot manages to capture past and present, actual and virtual. In the following chapter, we shall see many more examples of crystal-

images in Chabrol's films, as they are indeed key to his aesthetics but, unlike this one, they usually involve mirrors or reflections. According to Deleuze:

> What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past, which differ from each other in nature, or, what amounts to the same thing, it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. Time has to split at the same time as it sets itself out or unrolls itself : it splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past. Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we *see in the crystal*. The crystal-image was not time, but we see time in the crystal.[52]

> The crystal-image, or crystalline description, has two definite sides which are not to be confused. […] These are 'mutual images' as Bachelard puts it, where an exchange is carried out. The indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary, or of the present and the past, of the actual and the virtual, is definitely not produced in the head or the mind, it is the objective characteristic of certain existing images which are by nature double.[53]

Chabrol ensures that the view on the beach and on the sea (with boats) does not function as a clear marker of one period or another so that the ambivalence remains: the boy and the girl playing in the sand can either be 'real', present-day children or memory-images of Micheline

and her brother in the past. The music and the voice over help reinforce this ambivalence and convey a feeling of nostalgy. The distortion is both spatial and temporal and it is in order to account for the complexity of this type of image that both Foucault's concept of heterotopia and Deleuze's crystal-image benefit from being brought together and complemented. Chabrol casts suspicion over the status of the image by resorting here to a very unusual sort of flashback, which combines the real and the fantasy.

As we have seen in the above-mentioned films or examples, space is at the very heart of the Chabrolean negotiation between the Symbolic and the Realist prisms, between the real and the virtual that keep intermingling in various guises in Chabrol's *œuvre*. Although outwardly very different, these fluid and ambivalent spaces of illusion or heterotopias all contribute to Chabrol's grand mosaic and the making of his aesthetics of ambivalence and opacity.

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[1] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces'.

[2] *Ibid*.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] **Pagination.**

[5] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', **pagination.**

[6] See Chapter 2, **pagination.**

[7] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces'. **Pagination**.

[8] The generic ambivalence is reflected through the opening credits : the title *La Rupture* appears in stylised, threatening red letters (as in *Le Boucher*, or possibly a horror film) while the soundtrack alternates dark, menacing moments with lighter, more moody and introspective episodes, as if to encourage multiple reading grids.

[9] Hayward, *Cinema Studies. The Key Concepts*, p. 218.

[10] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 71.

[11] See Mulvey, 'Notes on Sirk and Melodrama'.

[12] Quoted in Hayward, *Cinema Studies*, p. 214.

[13] The three women are indeed called 'les Parques' ['Parcae'] by one of their fellow residents at the Pension Pinelli: the ridiculous but benevolent actor named Gérard Mostel (in a possible nod to Zero Mostel).

[14] *Télérama*, 6 octobre 1970.

[15] We have seen that Chabrol often resorts to a fairy tale motif : see for instance *Masques*, **pagination** and *La Fille coupée en deux*, **pagination.**

[16] And indeed, nurses and doctors are either terribly impersonal (so as to look like ghosts, in *Le Boucher*) or threatening in Chabrol's films : see the nurse giving tablets to visitors in Theratos, in *Dr M* ; or the nurse's evil gaze at the end of *Violette Nozière*.

[17] Like the balloon man, Dr Blanchard is Hélène's guardian angel: he warns her that Paul Thomas is not the terminally-ill man he pretends to be.

[18] Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, p. 136.

[19] This is a prolepsis of the foggy, drug-induced state she will be in, at the end of the film. Indeed, significantly, Hélène is under the effect of drugs both when she arrives at the pension and when she leaves it, making it a particularly distorted and hallucinatory space.

[20] **Pagination.**

[21] Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’.

http://foucault.info/documents/heterotopia/foucault.heterotopia.en.html

[22] According to Foucault, the mirror itself is both a utopia (‘a placeless place’) and a heterotopia: ‘In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy’. (p. 4) As we shall see in Chapter 6, Foucault anticipates here the Deleuzian crystal-image.

[23] Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p. 6 [web version].

[24] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', [find page].

[25] Chabrol, ‘Hitchcock devant le mal’, p. 20.

[26] See Dousteyssier-Khoze, ‘*Mise en abyme*, irony and visual cliché in Agnès Varda's *Le Bonheur* (1964)’.

[27] As Austin pointed out, the bourgeois *statu quo* is preserved at the end of the film with the elimination of the dangerous, disruptive elements (Charles and Laura). See Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 76.

[28] Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’.

[29] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 76.

[30] François is generally a colourless character who lacks any kind of depth and seems to function mostly as a foil or double for Charles; above all, he is interested in preserving the

well-being of Charles' wife and children. The clear partitioning of some shots showing François and Charles together into two halves (such as the one right at the end of Charles' first visit to François' house), seems to support this interpretation . And the fact that François is writing letters to Hélène at the end of the film leaves a door open for the possibility that he might soon replace Charles as a more acceptable husband and stepfather.

[31] Cortázar, 'The Night Face Up'.

[32] Chabrol, *Pensées, répliques et anecdotes*, p. 99.

[33] **Pagination.**

[34] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces'.

[35] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, p. viii.

[36] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 103.

[37] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, p. 262.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 262.

[39] See Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*: '[The castle] frequently is, or contains a hall of mirrors: as one sees the ghost fleeing down its darkened corridors, it may all too often be a vision of oneself that one sees, a previous self perhaps, a childhood self, victim of anxieties that should long since have disappeared or been overcome', p. 262.

[40] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic.*

[41] Indeed, the connection between the vampire and sexuality is well established. See Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, p. 269.

[42] See comments by Sencindiver and Royle on the uncanny quality of dolls. **Pagination.**

[43] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp.11-12.

[44] *La Demoiselle d'honneur*, DVD supplement, 'Un penchant pour le déséquilibre'.

[45] Royle, *The Uncanny*, p. 1.

[46] Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, p. 68.

[4747] See Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, p. 262.

[48] *La Demoiselle d'honneur*, DVD supplement, 'Un penchant pour le déséquilibre'.

[49] **Pagination.**

[50] *La Fleur du mal*, DVD supplement.

[51] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 7.

[52] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 84.

[53] *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

## Chapter 6: Through the Looking Glass: Chabrol's mirrors and the 'crystal-image'

Chabrol's films are often very reflexive: doubles, games of symmetries, mirrors, embedded narratives and images, intratextual winks[1] abound. These reflexive constructs can affect a given film to a larger or lesser extent[2] but, as a whole, they play a pivotal role in Chabrol's mosaic, in particular with respect to his exploration of the limits between the actual and the illusory, and as a means to achieve a 'traversée des apparences'.[3] As Dällenbach pointed out: 'a *mise en abyme* is any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it'.[4] According to him, 'its essential property is that it brings out the meaning and form of the work'.[5] Chabrol is particularly keen on such games and riddles which allow him to distance himself, sometimes in a very subtle way, from a realistic mode of representation: like Magritte, Chabrol excelled at subverting the representation of reality by making it look oneiric and uncanny.[6]

### Incipits *mises en abyme* and lack of closure: the Chabrolean spiral

Critics have often commented on the open-endedness of Chabrol's film endings, about their lack of closure and the ways in which they seem to ask more questions than they answer.[7] But not much attention has been paid to the relationship they have with the Chabrolean *incipits*, that sometimes contain in seed, embedded within their own structure, the entire film.

This spiral often requires a second viewing in order to be identified as such; it functions as a mini-story containing visual metaphors for the key themes (entrapment, for instance). Chabrol confessed his passion for this type of reflexive devices during the making of *La*

*Demoiselle d'honneur* : 'Ce qui serait idéal, c'est que chaque plan du film contienne tout le film (mais ça n'arrive jamais)' ['The ideal would be for each shot of a film to contain within itself the whole film (but it never happens)'].[8] The relationships between the beginnings and the endings are often complex in Chabrol's films: the settings can look very similar or even identical but there are small variations which yield meaning (and, indeed, 'repetition with a difference'[9] is one of the definitions of parody), as we shall see, for instance, in *L'Enfer*.[10]

Chabrol's last film, *Bellamy*, presents us with a striking example of an incipit-*mise en abyme*. The first sequence seems to function as a separate mini-summary or the smallest doll of a Russian dolls set insofar as it encapsulates the whole film: *Bellamy*, which starts as a light-mooded, parodic *policier* will end, little by little, through many detours, in melodrama and death. The first shot of this four-shot sequence, filmed in the marine cemetery in Sète, focuses on Georges Brassens' tomb before panning very slowly onto an alley. It is accompanied by two distinct types of diegetic sounds: a light-hearted whistling and the creaking of footsteps on the gravel. So far, everything points toward a subjective shot and the viewpoint of the invisible whistling character, whoever he is. However, things become more complicated, right from the second take: the extradiegetic music gradually covers the diegetic sound of the footsteps and the pan accelerates with a tracking forward and upward movement in order to display a larger part of the cemetery. As a result, the narratorial presence of the first shot is now more diffuse and, if still present, seems to be levitating slightly above ground, over the tombs (in stark contrast with the heavy footsteps of the very beginning). In the third shot, we leave the cemetery to approach the cliff overlooking the sea (there is an almost identical shot at the very end of the film) and the (subjective?) viewpoint slowly zooms in to reveal a carbonized body lying at the bottom of the cliffs, by the sea. The fourth and last shot of the sequence consists of a detail of the previous shot: it shows an incongruous carbonized body, still sitting in a driving position, with a severed head lying nearby on the

sand. It is a gruesome shot that has been carefully (and perversely) prepared: we have moved from the sanitized version of death offered by the peaceful, well-tended tombs of the cemetery to a shocking parody of death.

In this incipit, Chabrol is playfully experimenting with shifting perspectives and perception in order to destabilise the audience and encourage them to turn into detectives (à la Bellamy), thereby playfully mirroring some of the generic features of the film: who is the mysterious whistling presence? whose carbonized body is it, and what happened? The narratorial presence, firmly anthropomorphised in the first shot through diegetic sounds, becomes more and more evanescent and ghost-like. The blurred sound transition makes it difficult to pinpoint when exactly the subjective point of view vanishes and becomes objectified. This opening sequence is reminiscent of the beginning of *Le Corbeau*, in which Clouzot also played on the ambivalence of subjective/objective point of view (although in reverse), and showed a mysterious, ominous, ghost-like narrator ambling through a cloister/cemetery. As in Clouzot's film, there is in *Bellamy* a gradual shift from a peaceful atmosphere to one of menace, from lightness to darkness. Through this reflexive structure, revealed only at the end, Chabrol encourages a second viewing of the film. [11] The ending only raises more questions about the beginning, and vice-versa, in a dizzying, endless, unsolvable game of mirrors.

*Poulet au Vinaigre* opens up for its part on a *mise en abyme* of the viewing process with Chabrol playing on a 'double eye' of the camera: an anonymous photographer/narrator is taking photos at a garden party and what we see coincides with what the photographer sees through the camera lens. While the viewer never gets to see the photographer in person, *his* presence is acknowledged diegetically by some of the party guests who move out of *his* way or nod towards *him*: we learn indeed later on in the film that it was Tristan, the lover of the doctor's wife's, Delphine, who was taking photos at the party. But somehow, this cool, silent,

inquisitive eye that offers glimpses of a suspicious world of secrets and hushed conversations does not seem to fit with the rather colourless and useless character of lovesick Tristan. And during the film, the invisible narrator of the beginning will be quickly disqualified as a potential investigator of the corrupt bourgeoisie and replaced by another, more powerful and inquisitive gaze, Lavardin's. But, by keeping the photographer's identity concealed, this opening casts some suspicion both over the viewing/framing process and on a diegetic world in which appearances and secrecy prevail.

In *Le Boucher*, the opening credits also function as a sort of *mise en abyme*/prolepsis of the whole film: it gives insights into Cro Magnon's aspirations and fascination for beauty whilst revealing the darkness and violence inherent in that world: (threatening, phallic lines of the stalagmites and cave paintings representing animals – just like his ancestors the cavemen, Popaul the butcher is involved in everyday killing.

**Mirrors**

Another type of reflexive structure which, in our view, lies at the very heart of Chabrol's aesthetics of opacity is the crystal-image coined by Deleuze. Although, Deleuze identified other sorts of crystal-images (such as the ship),[12] the mirror is the most common type and the Chabrolean crystal-image is mostly vehiculed through mirrors. Of course, Chabrol is far from having a monopoly on mirrors. The films of the Nouvelle Vague are often filled with reflections of all sorts: see for instance *À bout de souffle* (1959); or Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961) in which the eponymous character is constantly trapped in an elaborate game of mirrors that attract the viewer's attention to the complexities of viewpoint and perception.[13] However, mirrors as privileged keys into the blurry real/virtual zone abound in Chabrols' films.[14] As Foucault argued, the mirror itself is a form of heterotopia:

> The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.[15]

In this, Foucault seems to have anticipated Deleuze's crystal-image, which is of course a key heterotopia in its very definition: 'the mirror-image is virtual in relation to the actual character that the mirror catches, but it is actual in the mirror which now leaves the character with only a virtuality and pushes him back out-of-field'.[16] As Magny also put it, with direct reference to Chabrol's cinema this time: 'Le miroir renvoie évidemment aux notions de double, de reflet, d'imaginaire, d'inversion et de prise de possession (mentale) d'un être par un autre' ['The mirror obviously refers to notions of double, reflection, imaginary, inversion and (mental) possession of a human being by another'].[17]

This concept of crystal-image is particularly fruitful to explore the nature of the fluid and playful relationship between illusion and reality in Chabrol's films, and the resulting opacity. Indeed, Chabrol develops a type of image in which reality flickers and tips over into the virtual. According to Deleuze's definition, the crystal-image is a type of shot or image in which the actual and the virtual become indistinguishable: 'the whole of reality, life in its entirety, [...] has become spectacle'.[18] It is precisely what is at stake in Chabrol's world. Whether it be through the recurrent use of mirrors, doubles, puppets/statues or a widespread process of theatricalization, Chabrol constantly arouses suspicion as to the nature of the spectacle we are witnessing. It is difficult to determine where the frontier between performance and 'reality' lies – this is clearly exemplified in *La Fille coupée en deux*, as we shall see. There is confusion as to where/what the mask is; where it starts and where it ends.

**The bourgeois household turns into a doll-house, a world of puppets,** that embues the diegetic world with an uncanny atmosphere and jeopardises the realistic dimension. As we have seen, for instance, in both *Landru* and *Les Fantômes du chapelier*, the main characters are represented as overacting puppets.[19] Hence the particular brand of Gothic or 'fantastique étouffé' ['stifled fantastic'][20] that pervades Chabrol's films and undermines the realistic varnish/coating. The notion of 'uncanny', derived from Freud's famous 1919 essay,[21] could also fruitfully, and more generally, be applied here. As Royle states in his monograph on the subject, 'the uncanny can be felt in response to witnessing epileptic or similar fits, manifestations of insanity *or other forms of what might appear more mechanical or automatic life*';[22] '[the uncanny] can be felt in response to dolls and other lifelike or mechanical objects'.[23] We saw to what extent dolls (*A double tour*; *La Demoiselle d'honneur*), or automatons or statues (real statues or characters interacting with statues or acting like ones – in *Landru*, *La Rupture*, *Inspecteur Lavardin*, for instance), whilst creating an uncanny effect, or because they created it, allowed Chabrol to explore various processes of fragmentation (of the mind; of social constructs; of spectatorship).

Even in the most realistically-grounded films, characters sometimes acquire a certain fixity that tends to freeze them into a statue-like position. This is the case in *La Femme infidèle* with the shot that famously combines the *Vertigo*-like combination of a zoom forwards and travelling backwards. As Delorme beautifully put it, 'le monde rangé se dilue dans le flou, se miniaturise et disparaît: la maison de poupée bourgeoise est transformée en décor instable pour automates figés' ['The neat, tidy world becomes blurry, turns into a miniature and disappears: the doll house has turned into an unstable setting for frozen automatons'].[24]

One could easily see Renoir's influence on Chabrol through this strange analogy between characters and puppets/statues. In *La Règle du jeu*, Chabrol's most watched Renoir film, the

characters can both look like puppets and be fascinated by them : see the marquess's love for automatons and his own excessively made-up face, shown in a close-up at the end of the film, when he acts as the aristocracy's puppeteer. Right from his first feature-length film, *Nana* (1926), Renoir too explored the real/virtual binary through the recurrent use of theatricality. Besides the recurrent use of mirrors, he multiplied the number of shots in which the characters look like mere puppets.[25] See for instance the puzzling shot at the end of *Nana* where statues and characters are gathered at the bottom of the huge staircase. The characters look frozen and are virtually undistinguishable from the statues. This is a perfect example of the ways in which, as Deleuze put it in his definition of the crystal-image, 'automata and living beings, objects and reflections enter into a circuit of coexistence and exchange which constitutes a « theatricality in the pure state »'.[26] Chabrol seems to have remembered Renoir's lesson well in order to build up his own aesthetics of opacity. Statues, dolls, automaton-like characters subvert the realistic dimension of the diegesis; they raise questions about spectatorship by blurring the line between animate/inanimate and illusion/reality; they ultimately interrogate what 'reality' is.

**Second-degree acting or overcoding** is another version of a very similar phenomenon. Some blurring occurs and one does not know where the performance starts and when it ends. Deleuze identified the concept of acting, and second-degree acting, as a key example of a crystal structure. According to him, the actor is by essence a 'monster':

> [The actor] makes the virtual image of the role actual, so that the role becomes visible and luminous. The actor is a 'monster', or rather monsters are born actors […] because they find a role in the excess or shortcoming that affects them. But the

> more the virtual image of the role becomes actual and limpid, the more the actual image of the actor moves into the shadows and becomes opaque.[27]

There are numerous examples, in Chabrol's filmography, when characters (and in particular 'monsters'), seem to be acting/overacting ; when they indulge in pure theatricality through quasi parodic performances. The line between the actual and the virtual is crossed or non-existent. This is what is at stake in *Landru* and *Les Fantômes du chapelier* (films in which a comic/parodic tone prevail, without any pretence towards realism, especially in the former's case).[28] *Que la bête meure* and *Les Noces rouges* (through the theatricality, the staged quality of the château scene) are also worth mentioning in this context. See, for example, in *Que la bête meure* the sequence in which Hélène (Caroline Cellier) is seduced by Charles (Michel Duchaussoy): awkwardly delivered and full of flat-voiced platitudes, the declaration is nevertheless convincing to his 'audience' (in this case Hélène). Ironically, the more Charles 'acts badly', the more he is believed. The members of Paul's (Jean Yanne) family, arrayed like stiff puppets in the living room, seem to be participating in a kind of appalling vaudeville in which each of them plays a specific 'role'. Paul himself is a too-perfect villain, a veritable 'caricature', as Charles puts it. With this effect of overcoding, of *mise en abyme*, Chabrol reinforces the opacity of the characters, seemingly urging the viewers to reflect on the status of the actor and the nature of the spectacle they are watching.

This kind of reflexive, second-degree performance raises questions about representation: to be and to appear become indissociable. Film after film, Chabrol shows that the 'real' is inseparable from the role, from the theatrical. The concept of performativity, that Judith Butler applied to gender identity, could also be useful to understand what is happening here : 'All gender [identity] is a form of parody, but some gender [identity] performances are more parodic than others'[29]. Deleuze talks for his part about the actor's cristal circuit as a

form of transvestite: 'this crystalline circuit of the actor, its transparent face and its opaque face, is travesty'.[30] In Chabrol's films, some performances are more parodic or excessive than others and the more excessive ones cast suspicion on the more 'discreet' ones with the result that the thin, invisible line between illusion/theatricality and reality is questioned again and again.

Some characters are only defined via their different roles or performances : this is the case in *Rien ne va plus* with Isabelle Huppert's ever-shifting identities. Her character Betty has no real face (nor hair colour), no real name (multiple passports); her only 'real' or, at least, more genuine relationship (with Victor/Michel Serrault, who might be her father/lover/associate or a mix of two or more) is the most opaque of all. Betty is only the sum of her 'performances' or masks, that is a complete cipher.

In Chapter 2 we saw how, in *La Fille coupée en deux,* theatricality was used to the extent that it subverted the generic stability of the film.[31] Through the same film, we are now going to see how Chabrol uses an elaborate type of 'crystal-image' or visual *mise-en abyme* in order to continue engaging the audience with narration and the meaning of the overall diegesis.

### ***La Fille coupée en deux*** **(2007) as crystal-film**

In *La Fille coupée en deux,* Chabrol encourages us to reflect on the status of the cinematographic image and its relationship to 'reality'. Generically speaking, *La Fille coupée en deux* is considerably less stable than most of Chabrol's other films, and this generic instability attracts our attention onto the theatrical and reflexive dimensions of the film. Deleuze's concept of the 'crystal-image' is particularly useful to explore the nature of the fluid and playful relationship between illusion and reality in the film, and the resulting opacity. Chabrol develops a type of crystal-image in which reality is fissured, tipping over

into the virtual where characters and (generic) identities fragment. Moreover, the extended metaphor of film/magic show and director/magician encourage a radical interrogation of reception. In this respect, Chabrol's penultimate film, *La Fille coupée en deux*, seems to function as a key that invites us both to revaluate the rest of his work and to consider a different approach to spectatorship.

*La Fille coupée en deux* seems to mark a deeply reflexive break in the well-oiled Chabrolean machine of the 1990ies and 2000ies; the crystal-image is both the vehicle and the most acute symptom of the generic fragmentation and the interplay between the real and the virtual. In his definition of the crystal-image, Deleuze claims that it is 'the whole of the real, life in its entirety, which has become spectacle'.[32] This 'cinematographic theatricality' seems to characterise our entire film, marked, as we have seen, by 'the exchange [that] is made between the actual and the virtual, the limpid and the opaque' ;[33] by the exchange between incompatible generic models, and between the spectacle of magic and a seedy and perverse reality. In the crystal-image, 'the actual image itself has a virtual image which corresponds to it like a double or a reflection'.[34] The theme of the double functions in precisely this way in *La Fille coupée en deux*. Additionally, Deleuze emphasizes the fundamental opacity of the crystal-image, the fluid exchange between the real and the imaginary that is an objective quality of certain images which are by nature double.[35] It is precisely this type of image, and this type of relationship of exchange or doubling, that is in play in *La Fille coupée en deux* (as seemingly indicated by the title itself). And it is essentially vehiculed through the image-reflection of the mirror. Due to the proliferation of virtual images, the actual character becomes absorbed into them and becomes a mere virtuality.[36] In *La Fille coupée en deux*, the recurring presence of mirrors results in a complicated game of reflections, a multiplication or fragmentation of the images/identities of the characters, which seem to veer between wholly incompatible worlds. We have already

seen this theme elsewhere in Chabrol's work, notably with that other 'girl cut in two', Violette Nozière, whose fundamental opacity stems in large part from this type of crystal-image.[37]

A key example of this phenomenon is the wedding dress trying-on sequence, which is interrupted by the arrival of Charles Saint-Denis, who attempts to convince Gabrielle not to marry Paul Gaudens. The shot is divided into three by an arrangement of mirrors, contributing to an effect of fragmentation and exchange between the real and virtual images. The viewer is driven to question the function of this system of reflections, and to wonder which is the reflection and which is the object being reflected. Gabrielle embraces Saint-Denis while swearing her eternal love for him: 'Je n'aimerai jamais un autre homme que toi' ['I will never love any man but you']. The phrase is pure cliché : it sounds false and an effect of dissonance is created. The kiss, which is highly conventional, becomes a parody of the first kiss between newlyweds in church. We are seemingly in the presence of a parody of a fairy tale, complete with a princess and her Prince (not so) charming. A reflection occurs at this moment, and the shot is literally 'cut in two'.

**[Insert image 9 *La Fille coupée en deux*]**

This crystal-image encourages us to reflect on the connection between the real and the imaginary within the diegesis. The *mise en scène* reinforces the theatrical quality of the setting: the dressing room with its curtains clearly functions as a stage on which Gabrielle is playing the role of a bride. The depth of field also shows a kitschy romantic painting in the background. In this way, Chabrol invites the viewer to read the scene differently, emphasizing its conventionality and artifice. It is a *tableau vivant* of two 'actors' caught in a reflection. The relationship between the two lovers, never very convincing, becomes a sort of comedy or masquerade. It is virtual, an illusion, constructed by the director-conjurer who emphasizes the artificiality of his creation in a reflexive movement.

As previously mentioned, the theme of the second-degree actor constitutes another key example of crystalline structure. For Deleuze, '[the actor] makes the virtual image of the role actual, so that the role becomes visible and luminous […]. But the more the virtual image of the role becomes actual and limpid, the more the actual image of the actor moves into the shadows and becomes opaque'.[38] This results in a kind of blurring, in which we no longer know where the role begins and ends. We have already seen examples of this blurring (in *Que la bête meure* for instance),[39] and it is precisely what happens at the end of the film when Gabrielle is on stage. The kitsch of the performance, at the end of the film, emphasizes its artificial nature and its status as a spectacle. It is a sort of *grand finale* in which the real and the virtual meet and mingle, causing the viewer to identify the end of the magic show with the end of the film. The points of view of the two audiences (the one in the diegetic world of the magic show and the one consisting of viewers of Chabrol's film) come together and become one. In a single reflexive movement, Chabrol thus incites us to reflect on the nature of the 'spectacle'/film we have just seen. Is it a mystification? An allegory in which film is magic and the director is a conjurer? The theme of the magician/conjurer as the director's alter ego is certainly present in the film; the magician uncle can – with a wave of his magic wand – change the course of the plot and give a new sense of generic identity or momentum to the film, and it is he who 'creates' the Prince Charming, Paul Gaudens, who will awaken Sleeping Beauty/Snow White.

In what is a recurring pattern for Chabrol, the end of the film is particularly ambivalent. Gabrielle's smile is difficult to decipher, as it, too, is 'cut in two'. The *femme fatale* (who has, in one way in another, caused the deaths of two men) seems to have become a sphinx-woman, or a 'crystal-woman'. Her eyes are vague, almost glassy, unreadable. However, a radical transformation occurs toward the end of the shot. Gabrielle's gaze suddenly focuses and fixes on the viewer (of the magic show and of the film), seeming to

create a relationship of complicity. A rebirth has taken place, symbolised by Gabrielle's increasingly radiant smile. The 'girl cut in two' is 'whole' at the end of the film. The colour red dominates, a striking symbol of the process of theatricalization at work in the film. With this smile, Gabrielle seems to announce the end of the magic show (and the film). But the question remains: of which spectacle is she announcing the end? And what role has she played in it? This is what Deleuze (in speaking of the films of Browning) called the 'crystalline circuit' of the actor, with its 'transparent face and its opaque face':[40]

> What we see in Browning [… is] a double face of the actor, that only the cinema could capture by instituting its own circuit. The virtual image of the public role becomes actual, but in relation to the virtual image of a private crime, which becomes actual in turn and replaces the first image. We no longer know which is the role and which is the crime.[41]

The magic trick has worked; the world of spectacle and illusion prevailed. *La Fille coupée en deux* is a reflection on the nature of cinema and its links with 'reality'. The end acts as a key encouraging us to re-examine the film: what is the role of illusion in the film, and perhaps in cinema in general? Where are the limits between the real and the virtual? The viewers (of the magic show, and of the film) doubts what they have seen, and wonder what is the 'trick'. Thus, Chabrol effectively calls the process of reception into question. We do not know where the 'spectacle' begins and where it ends, or even what the spectacle is. Like the girl in the title, the viewer is manipulated, 'cut in half'; both immersed in the film and held at a distance from it.

The Deleuzian crystal-image is instrumental in understanding the nature of the split that operates in the film between illusion and reality. Through its mirror games, *La Fille coupée en deux*, 'crystal-film' by Claude Chabrol, seems to hark back to a postmodern aesthetic of fragmentation, pastiche, instability, and even the impossibility of representation.

We are certainly justified in asking ourselves to what extent *La Fille coupée en deux* is a film representative of Chabrol's work and his aesthetic as a whole. The answer probably lies in the intensity and visibility of the 'crystallisation' process, of theatricalization and the blurring of genres at work in *La Fille coupée en deux.* As in *Dr M* (1990) and *Le Scandale* (1966) – the latter being an extreme example –, this process is considerably more obvious and noticeable than in more generically-stable films featuring, for example thrillers such as *Le Boucher* or *La Cérémonie* (1995). The Chabrolean aesthetic of opacity, of the smokescreen, of ambivalence and mystification, is especially blatant in this film. The metaphor of the director as magician/conjurer and the study of instability, the lack of reliability of the image and of representation, which is hinted at in other Chabrol films, is on full display here. In this respect, *La Fille coupée en deux* constitutes a fascinating case study, a sort of laboratory in which these gaps between image and meaning can be detected, gaps which are often less striking and obvious (in terms of narrative economy and impact) in other films, but which are nevertheless present in the rest of Chabrol's work, as we have seen. *La Fille coupée en deux* can thus be seen as a developing bath (to use a photographic term) of a film in Chabrol's œuvre, revealing both its fundamental opacity and a profound questioning of the status of the cinematographic image and of spectatorship.

### *L'Enfer*: a paranoid narrative

Although it also entails an exploration and interrogation of the status of the image*, L'Enfer* provides a very different take on the blurring of the real and the illusory. Thematically, the film deals with the gradual destruction of a family caused by a jealous husband, a topic previously treated by Chabrol in *La Femme infidèle* or *Une partie de plaisir*. But whereas in those films the male characters were faced with the evidence that their wives cheated (*La*

*Femme infidèle*) or wanted to leave them (*Une partie de plaisir*), and snapped as a result, most of *L'Enfer* consists of a detailed, quasi clinical study of Paul's psychosis (with both visual and auditive symptoms) and of his increasingly paranoid behaviour. Chabrol even delved into psychiatry in order to be able to depict what he calls Paul's 'faille mentale' [mental flaw] with accuracy.[42] As Anne Andreu put it in her review of the film, the real interest in *L'Enfer* lies in Chabrol's 'travail extraordinairement élaboré sur la nature des images, différentes selon le degré de réalité qu'elles sont censées exprimer' ['extraordinarily elaborate work on the nature of the images, which are different according to the degree of reality that they are supposed to represent'].[43] We will see in this section how the whole narrative becomes contaminated by Paul's paranoia.

Based on a screenplay by Henri-Georges Clouzot, who had started making a film entitled *L'Enfer* but stopped due to ill health and died shortly afterwards, Chabrol's version stars François Cluzet and Emmanuelle Béart in the main roles as hôtel owners Paul and Nelly. The film is in part constructed like a Hitchcockian suspense thriller around the question of whether Nelly is unfaithful or not (Austin rightly notes that the sequence in which Paul trails her in town recalls 'both Scottie following Madeleine in *Vertigo* and Albin following Hélène in *L'Œil du malin*').[44] However, although her behaviour is initially suspicious, the film quickly departs from that line in order to focus solely on Paul's psychotic behaviour.

While the 'attention to sounds effects as an index of the imaginary recalls Luis Buñuel's *Belle de jour* (1967)',[45] one could see in the relentless destruction of the cliché of the happily-married couple with a child/children a nod to Agnès Varda's *Le Bonheur* (1965). Right after the key sequence in which Paul caught Nelly and Martineau watching slides together (the main trigger for his obsessive jealousy), Paul wearily walks past a young couple staying in his hôtel – they are the image of happiness (a replica of the Paul and Nelly couple

at the beginning of the film) and the woman is carrying in her arms a huge bunch of sunflowers, the iconic flower used by Varda in *Le Bonheur*'s opening credits. Paul barely replies to their joyful greetings ('Il fait beau, n'est-ce pas?' ['wonderful weather, isn't it?']), his back is turned to the camera, a clear sign that this kind of 'happiness' is now behind him. And a bit later in the film, during one of Paul's lull period, a series of shots show Paul and Nelly on a pedal boat in the sun, kissing in a car and basking amorously in an idyllic landscape – pure clichés or adverts for happiness that strongly recall the bright yellow colours and countryside scenes from *Le Bonheur*. Like Varda, Chabrol seeks to undermine such clichés: the wedding photo of the happy couple is used throughout *L'Enfer* as an ironic counterpoint to document the degradation of Paul and Nelly's relationship. For instance, the extreme close-up on Paul and Nelly's faces, when they are being photographed by one of their guests (Nelly is holding a doll instead of a child to reinforce the fakeness of the 'happy family' shot), functions as a parody of the wedding photograph. Rather than closeness, there is tension between the characters; they are forced to pose and the extreme close-up focussing on Paul's concerned gaze and Nelly closed eyes, as well as the sound of a passing jet (a regular source of discomfort in the narrative), are used by Chabrol to convey a sense of fragmentation and menace. Just like Thérèse from *Le Bonheur*, Nelly is a rather one-dimensional character and for both women unhappiness stems from their husbands' behaviour. But whereas in Varda's film, the possibility of unhappiness is quickly erased to make space for the voracious, disturbing, all-powerful cliché of happiness, in Chabrol's *L'Enfer* the focus is on the slow unravelling of happiness through Paul's mental illness and paranoia.

Interestingly, the descent into obsessive jealousy and madness is expressed through what Austin calls the 'filmic metaphor of projection': '[from the moment] when Paul catches Nelly and Martineau (Marc Lavoine) watching slides together in the dark, [...] Paul moves

rapidly from being the object of filming [...] to creating his own hallucinatory film-cum-fantasy, with Nelly as the supposedly adulterous protagonist'.[46] Indeed, Paul becomes a distorted version of both a film director and a film audience, re-using episodes from his own life and casting them / reinterpreting them in a different light (with the image track offering, at least for most of the film, two different versions of an event, the real one and the imagined one). As the film moves on, Paul becomes increasingly uncapable of differentiating between the 'real' and the projection (as evidenced by his fit of rage during the slide show at the hotel: the innocent photos of Nelly shown to the guests are being re-interpreted, replaced in his mind and superimposed on the screen with images of her having an affair with Martineau). But then, so does the viewer. As Jean-François Rauger put it, '[Chabrol] refuse de traiter de façon irréaliste les moments de fantasme de son héros, mari maladivement jaloux au point d'imaginer sa femme le trompant avec tout le monde [...] Chabrol jette un doute définitif sur le statut de ces images. Sont-elles vraies? Sont-elles fantasmées?' ['Chabrol refuses to film the fantasies of his hero, a pathologically jealous husband who imagines that his wife cheats on him with everyone, in an unrealistic manner (...) Chabrol casts permanent suspicion on the status of these images. Are they actual? Are they fantasised?']47. Suspicion (or paranoia) seeps into the narrative well before the point of no return (that is the climactic sequence between Paul and Nelly at the end of the film, in which the border between the real and the hallucinatory, sanity and insanity completely collapses) and through outwardly innocent shots. For instance, what is the status and significance of the two mysterious night shots showing a ladder, right after the scene in which Paul asked Nelly 'A quoi tu rêves?' [what are you dreaming about?]. He folds her in an embrace that can be read as either comforting or threatening and two brief shots follow. The first one shows the ladder standing out clearly in the dark against a background of lake and garden and the second shot is filmed from the same angle but from a greater distance. Are these eerie, uncanny shots dream images? They are

filmed realistically enough, though, and seem to encourage the viewer to look for a metaphorical meaning or at least to experience the uncanniness of the scene. Could this kind of 'Jacob's ladder'[48] be a metaphor for the journey between two separate worlds, of reality and illusion (or hallucination), or sanity and insanity, that Paul has started embarking upon?

The recurrence of mirrors, which produce reflected and/or fragmented portraits of Paul, are also used to document the process of his mental degradation throughout the film. And sometimes the difficulty, for the audience, of delineating what is 'real' and what is reflected seems to mirror the fragmentation of Paul's mind and his increasing inability in distinguishing reality from hallucination. Towards the end of the film, Paul is shown reading a paper on the sofa while Nelly is feeding their son at the dinner table in the background. At first sight, this is a perfectly innocuous and banal snapshot of family life. But the striking thing about this shot is that the audience suddenly becomes aware that they have been looking at a reflection when Paul gets up and walks towards to the mirror. All three characters were indeed framed into the mirror but the mirror itself looked like an opening or partition wall between two rooms rather than a mirror. There is a destabilizing effect involved in such a shift in perspectives. Chabrol is telling us that appearances are fragile and deceptive. What looks 'real' can be a mere reflection or, indeed, illusion. In this particular case, the reflected image of the 'normal' (patriarchal) family is a fake, a mere illusion. Nelly and her son are in fact prisoners who have to live their lives in a glass house, under Paul's deranged and constant gaze. Similarly, right after Paul's fit during the slideshow, there is a shot showing him in reflection, looking so perfectly still and framed in the mirror above the fireplace that the mirror first looks like the painting of a man lying on a chair. Objects are not always what they seem in *L'Enfer*: paintings can turn out to be mirrors. Through this kind of playful 'trahison de l'image' ['treachery of images'] (in a Magrittian sense), Chabrol introduces a degree a suspicion in the audience: images can lie. These are early cracks or

clues in a narrative that will get more and more contaminated by a pervading sense of paranoia.

Another striking example of a contamination or distortion of the narration that cannot simply be attributed to Paul's subjective gaze is the lopsided shot of Paul going upstairs during the power cut. Paul is shown followed by his shadow and the staircase suddenly becomes wobbly, creating a dizzying effect. In what looks like a nod to German expressionism and a fitting tribute to Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* (see the distorted shadows of Vorzet in the staircase after his visit to Germain), Chabrol manages both to translate visually his main character's mental state and destabilize the narrative. Visual distortions are not the prerogative of subjective shots, that is of Paul as unreliable narrator. Realistically-filmed scenes start arousing suspicion as well. When Paul goes to the doctor's to look for Nelly after the rape scene, his rant and his accusations against the doctor unambiguously reveal the full extent of his madness; Nelly will even comment 'C'est monstrueux, il est fou' ['It's monstrous; he is mad']. The doctor lets Paul talk about Nelly's supposed nymphomania and pretends, or so it seems, to agree with his views ('Vous avez raison, Paul' ['You are right, Paul']; 'elle a besoin d'un psychiatre, mon vieux' ['She needs a psychiatrist, old chap']). During the phone conversation to his colleague, the doctor remains vague and somewhat elliptical, using terms that could apply either to Paul or to Nelly (as represented by Paul): 'J'ai un cas pour toi, la même histoire que le mois dernier. Hystérie, tu vois. Le mari vient de me faire un récit très significatif, tu vois ce que je veux dire?' ['I have a case for you, the same story as last month. Hysteria, you see. The husband has just told me the story in unequivocal terms, do you see what I mean?']. The outmoded label of 'hysteria' used by the doctor is sufficiently general to refer either to Paul's symptoms or to those that Paul ascribes to Nelly (Paul himself used that very expression just before). And when the doctor tells Nelly: 'Je sais que c'est dur, Nelly, courage' ['I know it's hard, Nelly, be brave'], this could

again refer either to the fact that her husband will be locked up or that she will herself be sent to the clinic. The most realistic interpretation is that the doctor does not want to arouse Paul's suspicions and decides to play along with him. However, Chabrol carefully lets doubt prevail. When the doctor says that he will come to fetch them both at seven on the following morning, there is a sense of unease and a niggling feeling in the viewer that something is not quite right, reinforced by Nelly's own disbelief at what the doctor is saying and her dazed reaction: could it be (and this is a terrifying option which toys with the Gothic genre and its narrative of persecution and paranoia)[49] that the doctor believed Paul's narrative of the husband brought to the end of his tether by a nymphomaniac wife? And, if not, why doesn't he do more to protect Nelly, whom he has just examined and described as nearly crippled ['estropiée'] by Paul; why doesn't he keep her away with immediate effect from an abusive and mentally-unstable husband? Like Nelly, the viewer does not know whether to trust the doctor or not. Paul's paranoia seems to have insiduously crept in, invaded the 'objective' narrative and contaminated the viewing process.

The blurring between reality and hallucination reaches a climax in the complex and fragmented final bedroom/bathroom sequence. For instance, although it is filmed perfectly realistically, did Paul dream up the conversation with Nelly in the bathroom (in which she says, quite fittingly, 'c'est comme un rêve' ['It's like a dream'])? Has he killed Nelly, as the hallucinatory and elliptical montage seems to imply, or has he imagined that he killed her? While it was fairly easy in the earlier parts of the film to figure out what was a projection of his psychosis and what was real, it is no longer the case at the end of the film because the narrative process has been contamined by Paul's psychosis. From the moment when Paul entered the bathroom and looks at himself in the mirror, after giving Nelly a double dose of sleeping pills, he is caught in a web of reflections that are intertwined with sound hallucinations (sirens; Nelly talking to the doctor on the phone) and completely collapse the

reality/virtuality border. The dizzying pan from left to right starts with Paul looking through the window, his right profile turned to the camera, and ends in a circular movement with a view on Paul's left profile. We seem to have entered a crystal maze: it is an illogical, impossible shot reflecting Paul's process of fragmentation and a striking 'crystal-image' insofar as 'the actual image itself has a virtual image which corresponds to it like a double or a reflection'.[50] In a night scene reminiscent of Hélène locking herself in the school at the end of *Le Boucher*, Paul barricades himself in this bathroom full of mirrors while nervously checking the surroundings of the house: although they are filmed realistically, the subjective high-angle shots on the ambulance are somewhat de-realized by the provocative pause struck by the paramedics waiting for Paul. The worrying grin on their faces seems to indicate that this is a mental image, a projection of Paul's fear to be locked up in a psychiatric institution. Paul's full-blown psychosis has now turned him into a director and actor in a horror movie as the elliptical montage involving blood and a razor confirms. Hallucinatory sounds and images constantly mix up and the various shots possess a reflective / refractive quality that makes it difficult to pin down their status: are they mental or actual images? As previously mentioned, this is the very nature of Deleuze's crystal-image: 'The indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary, or of the present and the past, or the actual and the virtual, is the objective characteristic of certain existing images which are by nature double'.[51] But, and this is an interesting take on the crystal-image in *L'Enfer*, this 'indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary' that according to Deleuze 'is definitely not produced in the head or the mind' is also illustrative in this case of the fragmentation of the main character's mind. The crystal-image therefore becomes a powerful experimental tool allowing Chabrol to film psychosis, to represent it as 'realistically' as possible. Style and thematic content have merged in *L'Enfer*. Far from being solely a film *about* paranoia, *L'Enfer* is also a paranoid narrative: the theme has spilled over and contaminated the whole viewing process. Contrary to Austin's

interpretation, for whom 'the ending of *L'Enfer* is not totally ambiguous' and who sees in Nelly's murder a fantasy,[52] it is undecidability and lack of closure that prevail in the end. The apparently stable, non-hallucinatory shot showing Nelly still tied to the bed – and therefore unharmed – after Paul wakes up is simply not sufficient 'evidence' to be relied upon. Paul is in utter darkness as to what he has done, not done, should do or will do; he is shown trapped behind the window while it is raining outside (a fitting metaphor for his mental entrapment) and his attempt at clarity through the last word 'Voyons' ['let's see'] only results in a blurry high-angle shot over a small corner of the dark roof and garden – a poignant visual metaphor for his diminished reason. The sign 'Sans fin' ['No ending'] that appears in the epilogue – a pan over a sunny landscape that leads to the entrance of Paul and Nelly's hôtel –, is a clear indication that Chabrol (in rather typical fashion) rejects any closure. The same shot was indeed used at the beginning of the film. The *mise en abyme* emphasises the circularity of a narrative that, like Paul's thought processes, seems to be going in endless circles. 'L'enfer' or hell is also about the eternal return of things.

Other films could be fruitfully exploited in order to continue exploring Chabrol's crystal games and the blurring of the border between the actual and the virtual. *Le Cri du hibou* (1987), a modern Gothic / fantastic tale about the evil power of the gaze, is one such film. The convoluted narrative, full of prolepses, mirrors and symbols (with the owl as a Gothic motif emphasising the sense of menace, curse and foreboding) is characterized by its deeply oneiric quality. As in *Juste avant la nuit*, the realistic background is constantly shattered and undermined, and the characters seem to evolve in a parallel universe that defies and challenges the viewer's perception. Although the overly convoluted plot (adapted from a Patricia Highsmith novel) could have benefitted from a sharper editing, *Le Cri du hibou* is fascinating as a profoundly reflexive, liminal film about 'the virtuality of things', as Chabrol

put it.[53] Like *La Fille coupée en deux* and *L'Enfer*, it openly challenges the status of the image and the process of reception, thereby considerably expanding the horizon of expectations as to what a 'Chabrolean' film/thriller consists of.

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[1] Some Chabrolean characters are watching other films by Chabrol: *Les Noces Rouges* in *La Cérémonie*; *Les Biches* is showing in the cinema in *La Femme infidèle* when Charles is driving to dispose of the body of his wife's lover.

[2] In some extreme cases, reflexivity affects the whole film and can even become one of its main motifs: see for instance Chabrol's experimentation with form and structure in the early days of the Nouvelle Vague (*A double tour*) or in *Le Scandale*. See also *Dr M*.

[3] Chabrol used the expression himself in, 'La peau, l'air et le subconscient'[on his first film, *Le Beau Serge*], p. 24.

[4] Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, p. 8.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[6] As already mentioned, Chabrol named Magritte as one of his three favourite painters (together with Vélasquez and Renoir) in his Proust questionnaire (*Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 353). See our analysis of *Au cœur du mensonge*, **pagination**.

[7] See for instance Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, p. 142.

[8] *La Demoiselle d'honneur*, DVD supplement, 'Un air de rien'.

[9] According to Hutcheon, parody is 'repetition with critical difference that allows ironic signalling of difference at the heart of similarity'. See *A Theory of Parody*, p. 26.

[10] **Pagination**.

[11] **Pagination**.

[12] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 76.

[13] See Nelson, ‘Reflections in a Broken Mirror’ [on Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7*].

[14] **Pagination.**

[15] Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’.

[16] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 73.

[17] Magny, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 172.

[18] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 112.

[19] **Pagination**

[20] du Mesnildot, ‘Les diaboliques’, p. 15.

[21] Freud, ‘The Uncanny’.

[22] Royle, *The uncanny*, p. 1 [my emphasis].

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 2

[24] Delorme, ‘Une miniature du bonheur’, p. 30.

[25] See Dousteyssier-Khoze, ‘De Zola à Renoir, Nana fait la pantomime’.

[26] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 88.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[28] **Pagination.**

[29] Salih, *Judith Butler*, p. 64.

[30] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 76.

[31] **Pagination.**

[32] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 87.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 71.

[35] See quotation by Deleuze, **pagination**.

[36] See quotation by Deleuze, **pagination**.

[37] **Pagination**.

[38] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 75.

[39] **Pagination.**

[40] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 76.

[41] *Ibid.*,pp. 75-76.

[42] See Pascal, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 133.

[43] Anne Andreu, *L'Événement du jeudi*, 17 February 1994. Quoted by Michel Pascal, in *Claude Chabrol*, p. 134.

[44] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 119.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

[46] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, pp. 119-20.

[47] Rauger, 'Un autre monde', p. 11.

[48] As a former Catholic, Chabrol would have been well versed into this type of religious imagery. Let us also mention in passing, as a possible wink (or a bit of free-wheeling intertextuality à la Barthes), the cult psychological horror film *Jacob's Ladder* made in 1990 by Adrian Lyne with Tim Robbins, which also deals with a character haunted by hallucinations and keeps collapsing the border between reality and illusion.

[49] See Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, section on 'Persecution and Paranoia', pp. 273-277. For them, the Gothic deals with 'representations of persecuted victims, subject to violence and pursuit for incomprehensible reasons', p. 273. If the doctor were to believe Paul, Nelly would clearly fall into this category.

[50] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, p. 71.

[51]*Deleuze, Cinema II*,pp. 72-73. Already quoted, **pagination**.

[52] Austin, *Claude Chabrol*, p. 122.

[53] **Pagination.**

## Conclusion: Towards an Aesthetics of Visual Opacity

Chabrol's filmography greatly gains in depth and significance by being examined as a whole. Following in Balzac's footsteps, Chabrol subscribed to the idea that an *œuvre* is above all a mosaic, made of pieces that may very well be uneven in quality but which, ultimately, provide an overarching structure and a unifying vision. So what exactly is this 'very precise vision of things'[1] that Chabrol's *œuvre* is supposed to convey? One key lesson is that one should steer clear of certainties of all kinds and that nothing is ever quite what it seems. We have seen that the fortunes of the generic label 'chabrolien' testify to Chabrol's enduring legacy on the contemporary French/Francophone thriller. Thus, a 'Chabrolean film' is characterised by its objective camera work, narrative tension, claustrophobic atmosphere, enigmatic characters, dysfunctional family theme, class tensions and the portrayal of a provincial and/or middle-class setting. However accurate, this definition of the 'Chabrolean' film only accounts for one side of Chabrol, for the most accessible and visible thematic and stylistic aspects. There is another more elusive, complex, self-reflexive Chabrol who tirelessly works on the image in order to opacify the representation. The viewer, caught in the pleasures and the apparent comfort of the genre film, might very well miss such reflexive cracks or clues which undermine the realistic grounding of the films and affect the overall vision.

The uncanny detail is one such 'crack'. We have seen examples of it in the study (see the shot with the ladder in *L'Enfer*, for instance).[2] It is a discreet Chabrolean device which, although more minor than the *mise en abyme* and other mirror games – in the sense that it does not affect or reflect the overall structure of the film –, contributes too, through little

touches, to the building up of an aesthetics of opacity. Indeed, Chabrol enjoys inserting shots (or objects, expressions, characters within shots) which serve no apparent diegetic function; which are absurd, out of place, incongruous. He is perfectly aware that many such details might go unnoticed on the viewer's part but, according to him, it is about creating a mood, an atmosphere. Put all together and incorporated within the larger narrative frame, these uncanny details are supposed to trigger 'something', to create a sense of unease in the viewer.[3] One of Chabrol's late films, *La Demoiselle d'honneur*[4] provides striking uncanny details that are worth mentioning, if only because Chabrol himself singled them out during his 'leçon de cinéma' about the making of the film.[5] If taken in, these uncanny shots can bring the audience to revisit the meaning of what they have just seen and question the representation. The first one occurs in the park where a worried Philippe/Benoît Magimel came to ponder over Senta's actions. A full shot of a young boy playing hoop and stick, seen from Philippe's perspective, interrupts the narrative logic: the boy, dressed in a dated, typically bourgeois *marinière*, seems to have literally jumped out of a costume drama. Chabrol was particularly keen on this bizarre and poetic vision / appearance, as he admitted during the making of *La Demoiselle d'honneur*.[6] This shot takes place precisely at a point in time when the dreary truth has eventually sunk in Philippe's mind: his girlfriend Senta is a killer; his whole world is collapsing. Could this therefore be a hallucination of his? a projection of his desire to come back to an age of past innocence? The camera does not suggest so; the shot is filmed realistically. But if this is 'really' happening in the diegetic world, what does the dress code stand for? Is the child dressed up for a party (but then where are the other children?) or are these his everyday clothes and toys? No explanation is given, this anachronistic little character is seemingly alone, playing in the park. A small, absurd crack in the narrative has occured, which points to the blurry frontier between reality and illusion. Even the most unlikely things can suddenly erupt in one's life: one's girlfriend is a

psychopathic killer and young boys from the past might be playing around in the park. Philippe, a character who (apparently) stands for normality, is suddenly faced with events that defy his understanding. Not only is his outlook on the world shattered but, beyond that, the narrative itself comes under suspicion.

A second example of uncanny detail is when Thomas Chabrol, playing the role of a police inspector, suddenly rolls his eyes when prononcing the word 'kleptomane' ['kleptomaniac'] in *La Demoiselle d'honneur*. Chabrol personally insisted on this detail because 'Ça fait étrange, ça fait bidon' ['it looks strange; it looks fake'].[7] Although, it can easily be overlooked, this slight 'effet de décalage' [discrepancy effect] is part of a larger canvas in which incongruous events take place. The uncanny shot is there to titillate the viewer's sense of the absurd and derealize the diegesis in a very subtle way. Unlike the 'détail vrai' ['true detail'] used by 19th-century Realist/Naturalist writers – which is fully justified diegetically insofar as it is supposed to reinforce the accuracy of a given setting, character or social background –, such uncanny shots do not bring any authenticity or 'illusion of reality'. Quite the opposite. They tend to deconstruct the fabric of reality, and to inject a touch of uncanny (or Gothic or fairy-tale) into the diegesis. As brief distractions or interludes from an otherwise pretty dark story (see the balloon man in the park in *La Rupture*, a character who functions in a similar way to the boy-with-a-hoop from *La Demoiselle d'honneur*), they bring a touch of nonsensical lightness and poetry to the film. They are incongruous bubbles that complexify the narrative.

The uncanny detail is Chabrol's way of hinting that not everything is understandable, decipherable, neither on a large scale nor on a smaller one. Representation needs to account for this and the uncanny shot raises questions about the frontier between reality and illusion and about causality. The uncanny or incongruous detail is ultimately about the deconstruction of certainties: it is a playful warning against a unicity of vision. But it can easily be missed. It

is for the audience to look out for these discreet signs. While Chabrol's œuvre is to some extent a 'Cinema of Transgression', it is at the opposite end of the trend identified by Beugnet in contemporary cinema.[8] Far from concentrating on corporeality and sensation, the transgression is mostly diffuse, hidden, elliptical. The subversive subject matter (incest, for instance) and carefully-honed style remain concealed behind a mask of clarity and generic accessibility.

Chabrol's aesthetics of opacity is indeed conveyed through a type of cinematography which deconstructs from within the apparent clarity of the genre and the sets of expectations inherent in genre films. Typically, film techniques such as flashbacks, close-ups and zoom shots are used to blur meaning rather than provide clarification. Foucault showed us that Chabrolean spaces can tremble, open up into 'other spaces' that undermine the realistic representation. And, thanks to Deleuze, we have seen that, together with these heterotopias of crisis, Chabrol's major achievement is the honing of a 'crystal-image' that contains in itself myriad possibilities and interpretations that cancel each other out. Such cracks in the diegetic/generic surface (whether they be sudden shifts in generic conventions; second-degree acting and the extensive use of theatricality or the proliferation of mirrors and doubles) contribute to a radical interrogation of reception / spectatorship and of cinema in general. Admittedly, this interrogation varies in intensity from film to film. But as I have attempted to show, his less successful films commercially often prompt us to re-evaluate the rest of his work.

In the memoirs compiled shortly before his death, Chabrol reflected that his films 'cherchent à garder leurs secrets' ['seek to keep their secrets'].[9] This is what the aesthetics of opacity that we have tried to unveil in this study is about. Chabrol produced a mangrove-like œuvre: the closer one gets to it, the more intricate and complex the root-system appears to be. We have noted the Magrittian quality of some of his films and his aesthetic of the *trompe-*

*l'œil*. By first allaying suspicion throught the comfort of the generic frame, Chabrol is then able to strike and destabilize when we least expect him to do so, through a mere (uncanny) detail, a character who 'overacts', a space that acquires another density, or a mirror image that suddenly casts a different, more fragmented and unstable light on the diegetic reality.

Through an array of recurring themes and motifs (murders; masks and statues; mirrors; an obsession with voyeurism, forbidden desires, fragmented family relations, inscrutable female characters, theatricality and a distinct taste for the uncanny), Chabrol's **crystal-gaze** encourages us to reflect on the status of the cinematographic image and its relationship to illusion and 'reality'. His deceptively-accessible, multi-faceted, open-ended and reflexive *œuvre* deserves to be regarded as a major achievement in the history of cinema. Far from being a child who 'keeps a collection of insects in a glass case',[10] Chabrol is a philosopher whose fascination with the darkness of human nature, mastery of the image and its grammar, and constant awareness of and concern for the audience, allowed him to construct a shimmering, multi-dimensional cinematic mosaic.

Chabrol's passion for opacity is encapsulated in the quotation from Auden that is used as an epilogue for his very last film, *Bellamy*: 'There's always another story. There's more than meets the eye'. It is indeed a perfect conclusion to his multi-layered, crystal-cinema: However, it is quite fitting that Chabrol himself should have the last word:

> Plus on cherche à comprendre, moins on comprend. Le vertige que cela procure me plaît beaucoup.
>
> [The more one seeks to understand, the less one does. The vertigo that results from it pleases me very much].[11]

[1] Chabrol, *Et pourtant je tourne*, p. 347.

[2] **Pagination**.

[3] See *La Demoiselle d'honneur*, DVD supplement, 'Un penchant pour le déséquilibre'.

[4] Significantly, the two examples which follow are not to be found in the Ruth Rendell's novel on which the film is based, which makes our case stronger: this kind of incongruous detail is Chabrol's own touch.

[5] See *La Demoiselle d'honneur*, DVD supplement, 'Un penchant pour le déséquilibre'.

[6] *Ibid*.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*.

[9] *Chabrol par lui-même et pas les siens*, p. 105.

[10] Fassbinder, 'Insects in a Glass Case', p. 252.

[11] Jousse et Guérin, 'Entretien avec Claude Chabrol', p. 32.

# FILMOGRAPHY

**LE BEAU SERGE** (1958)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Principal actors: Jean-Claude Brialy, Gérard Blain, Bernadette

Lafont, Michèle Meritz

**LES COUSINS** (1959)

Screenplay: Claude Chabrol

Dialogues: Paul Gégauff

Principal actors: Gérard Blain, Jean-Claude Brialy, Juliette Mayniel,

Stéphane Audran

**À DOUBLE TOUR** (1959)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Paul Gégauff

Based on the novel *The Key to Nicholas Street* by Stanley Ellin

Principal actors: Madeleine Robinson, Antonella Lualdi, Jean-Paul

Belmondo, Jacques Dacqmine, Bernadette Lafont,

André Jocelyn

**LES BONNES FEMMES** (1960)

Screenplay and dialogues: Paul Gégauff

Based on an original idea by Claude Chabrol

Principal actors: Bernadette Lafont, Stéphane Audran, Clotilde

Joano, Lucile Saint-Simon, Mario David, Pierre Bertin

**LES GODELUREAUX** (1961)

Screenplay: Éric Ollivier and Paul Gégauff

Adaptation: Paul Gégauff and Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel by Éric Ollivier

Dialogues: Paul Gégauff

Principal actors: Jean-Claude Brialy, Charles Belmont, Bernadette

Lafont, Jean Tissier, Sacha Briquet

**L'ŒIL DU MALIN (1961)**

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

With the collaboration of: Matthieu Martial

Principal actors: Jacques Charrier, Stéphane Audran, Walther Reyer

**OPHÉLIA** (1962)

Screenplay: Paul Gégauff

Adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol and Paul Gégauff

Based on *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

Principal actors: Alida Valli, Claude Cerval, André Jocelyn,

Juliette Mayniel

**LANDRU** (1962)

Screenplay and dialogues: Françoise Sagan and Claude Chabrol

Principal actors: Charles Denner, Danielle Darrieux, Michèle

Morgan, Juliette Mayniel, Catherine Rouvel,

Mary Marquet, Stéphane Audran

**LE TIGRE AIME LA CHAIR FRAÎCHE** (1964)

Screenplay: Antoine Flachot (pseudonym for Roger Hanin)

Adaptation and dialogues: Jean Halain

Principal actors: Roger Hanin, Maria Mauban, Daniela Bianchi,

Roger Dumas

**MARIE-CHANTAL CONTRE Dr KHA** (1965)

Screenplay: Claude Chabrol and Christian Yve, based on the character of Jacques Chazot

Dialogues: Daniel Boulanger

Principal actors: Marie Laforêt, Francisco Rabal, Serge Reggiani,

Charles Denner, Akim Tamiroff, Roger Hanin,

Stéphane Audran

**LE TIGRE SE PARFUME À LA DYNAMITE** (1965)

Screenplay: Antoine Flachot (Roger Hanin)

Adaptation and dialogues: Jean Curtelin

Principal actors: Roger Hanin, Margaret Lee, Michel Bouquet,

Roger Dumas

**LA LIGNE DE DÉMARCATION** (1966)

Screenplay: Colonel Rémy

Adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Principal actors: Maurice Ronet, Jean Seberg, Daniel Gélin,

Stéphane Audran, Jacques Perrin, Jean Yanne,

Noël Roquevert

**LE SCANDALE** (1966)

Screenplay: Claude Brûlé and Derek Prouse

Based on an idea by William Benjamin

Dialogues: Paul Gégauff

Principal actors: Anthony Perkins, Maurice Ronet,

Yvonne Furneaux, Stéphane Audran

**LA ROUTE DE CORINTHE** (1967)

Screenplay: Daniel Boulanger and Claude Brûlé

Based on the novel by Claude Rank

Dialogues: Daniel Boulanger

Principal actors: Jean Seberg, Maurice Ronet, Christian Marquand,

Michel Bouquet

**LES BICHES** (1967)

Screenplay: Claude Chabrol and Paul Gégauff

Dialogues: Paul Gégauff

Principal actors: Stéphane Audran, Jacqueline Sassard,

Jean-Louis Trintignant

**LA FEMME INFIDÈLE** (1968)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Principal actors: Stéphane Audran, Michel Bouquet, Maurice Ronet,

Michel Duchaussoy

**QUE LA BÊTE MEURE** (1969)

Screenplay and dialogues: Paul Gégauff and Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel *The Beast Must Die* by Nicholas Blake

Principal actors: Michel Duchaussoy, Caroline Cellier, Jean Yanne,

Anouk Ferjac, Maurice Pialat

**LE BOUCHER** (1969)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Principal actors: Stéphane Audran, Jean Yanne, Roger Rudel

**LA RUPTURE** (1970)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel *The Balloon Man* by Charlotte Armstrong

Principal actors: Stéphane Audran, Jean-Pierre Cassel, Jean-Claude

Drouot, Michel Bouquet, Annie Cordy, Jean Carmet,

Michel Duchaussoy, Catherine Rouvel

**JUSTE AVANT LA NUIT** (1971)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel *The Thin Line* by Edward Atiyah

Principal actors: Stéphane Audran, Michel Bouquet, François

Périer, Jean Carmet

**TEN DAYS' WONDER [LA DÉCADE PRODIGIEUSE]** (1971)

Screenplay: Paul Gégauff and Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel by Ellery Queen

Adaptation and dialogues: Paul Gégauff

Principal actors: Orson Welles, Marlène Jobert, Anthony Perkins,

Michel Piccoli

**DOCTEUR POPAUL** (1972)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Paul Gégauff

Based on the novel *Meurtre à loisir* by Hubert Monteilhet

Principal actors: Jean-Paul Belmondo, Mia Farrow, Laura Antonelli,

Daniel Ivernel

**LES NOCES ROUGES** (1972)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Principal actors: Stéphane Audran, Michel Piccoli, Claude Piéplu,

Clotilde Joano

**NADA** (1973)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Jean-Patrick

Manchette and Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel by Jean-Patrick Manchette

Principal actors: Maurice Garrel, Michel Duchaussoy, Fabio Testi,

Mariangela Melato, Lou Castel, Michel Aumont, Viviane

Romance, André Falcon, François Perrot

**UNE PARTIE DE PLAISIR** (1974)

Screenplay and dialogues: Paul Gégauff

Principal actors: Paul Gégauff, Danièle Gégauff, Clémence Gégauff,

Cécile Vassort

**LES INNOCENTS AUX MAINS SALES** (1974)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Based in the novel *The Damned Innocents* de Richard Neely

Principal actors: Romy Schneider, Rod Steiger, François Maistre,

Pierre Santini, Jean Rochefort, François Perrot

**LES MAGICIENS** (1975)

Screenplay and adaptation: Pierre Lesou

Based on the novel *Initiation au meurtre* by Frédéric Dard

Dialogues: Paul Gégauff

Principal actors: Jean Rochefort, Stefania Sandrelli, Franco Nero,

Gert Fröbe

**FOLIES BOURGEOISES** (1976)

Screenplay: Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel *Le Malheur fou* by Lucie Faure

Adaptation: Ennio de Concini

Principal actors: Stéphane Audran, Bruce Dern, Jean-Pierre Cassel,
Sydne Rome, Ann-Margret, Maria Schell, Francis Perrin,
Charles Aznavour

**ALICE OU LA DERNIÈRE FUGUE** (1976)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol
Principal actors: Sylvia Kristel, Charles Vanel, André Dussollier,
Jean Carmet, Fernand Ledoux, Thomas Chabrol

**BLOOD RELATIVES [LES LIENS DE SANG]** (1977)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol
and Sydney Banks
Based on the novel *Blood relatives* by Ed McBain
Principal actors: Donald Sutherland, Stéphane Audran,
Micheline Lanctôt, Donald Pleasence, David Hemmings,
Micheline Presle

**VIOLETTE NOZIÈRE** (1977)

Screenplay: Odile Barski, Hervé Bromberger
and Frédéric Grendel
Adaptation and dialogues: Odile Barski
Based on the book by Jean-Marie Fitère
Principal actors: Isabelle Huppert, Stéphane Audran, Jean Carmet,
Jean-François Garreaud, François Maistre, Fabrice
Luchini, Bernadette Lafont

**LE CHEVAL D'ORGUEIL** (1980)

Screenplay: Claude Chabrol

Adaptation and dialogues: Daniel Boulanger

Based on the novel by Pierre-Jakez Hélias

Principal actors: Jacques Dufilho, François Cluzet, Bernadette

Le Saché, Michel Blanc, Dominique Lavanant

**LES FANTÔMES DU CHAPELIER** (1982)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel by Georges Simenon

Principal actors: Michel Serrault, Charles Aznavour, Aurore

Clément, François Cluzet, Monique Chaumette

**LE SANG DES AUTRES** (1983)

Screenplay and adaptation: Brian Moore

Based on the novel by Simone de Beauvoir

Dialogues: Brian Moore and Odile Barski

Principal actors: Jodie Foster, Michael Ontkean, Lambert Wilson,

Stéphane Audran, Alexandra Stewart, Sam Neill,

Jean-François Balmer, Jean-Pierre Aumont

**POULET AU VINAIGRE** (1984)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Dominique Roulet

and Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel *Une mort en trop* by Dominique Roulet

Principal actors: Jean Poiret, Stéphane Audran, Lucas Belvaux,

Michel Bouquet, Pauline Lafont, Jean Topart,

Caroline Cellier

**INSPECTEUR LAVARDIN** (1985)

Screenplay: Claude Chabrol and Dominique Roulet

Dialogues: Dominique Roulet

Principal actors: Jean Poiret, Jean-Claude Brialy, Bernadette Lafont,

Jean-Luc Bideau

**MASQUES** (1986)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol and Odile Barski

Principal actors: Philippe Noiret, Robin Renucci, Bernadette Lafont,

Monique Chaumette, Anne Brochet, Roger Dumas

**LE CRI DU HIBOU** (1987)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

and Odile Barski

Based on the novel by Patricia Highsmith

Principal actors: Christophe Malavoy, Mathilda May, Jean-Pierre

Kalfon, Virginie Thévenet

**UNE AFFAIRE DE FEMMES** (1988)

Screenplay and adaptation: Claude Chabrol and Colo Tavernier

Loosely based on the book by Francis Szpiner

Dialogues: Colo Tavernier

Principal actors: Isabelle Huppert, François Cluzet, Marie

Trintignant, Nils Tavernier, Marie Bunel, Dominique

Blanc, Dani, François Maistre

**QUIET DAYS IN CLICHY [JOURS TRANQUILLES À CLICHY]** (1989)

Screenplay: Ugo Leonzio

Adaptation and dialogues: Ugo Leonzio and Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel by Henry Miller

Principal actors: Andrew McCarthy, Nigel Havers, Barbara De Rossi,

Isolde Barth, Eva Grimaldi, Anna Galiena,

Stéphane Audran

**Dr M** (1989)

Screenplay and dialogues: Sollace Mitchell

Based on an original idea by Thomas Bauermeister

and the novel *Dr Mabuse the Gambler* by Norbert Jacques

Adaptation: Claude Chabrol and Odile Barski

Principal actors: Alan Bates, Jennifer Beals, Jan Niklas,

Benoît Régent

**MADAME BOVARY** (1990)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel by Gustave Flaubert

Principal actors: Isabelle Huppert, Jean-François Balmer,

Christophe Malavoy, Jean Yanne, Lucas Belvaux,

Christiane Minazzoli, François Maistre, Thomas Chabrol

**BETTY** (1992)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Based on the novel by Georges Simenon

Principal actors: Marie Trintignant, Stéphane Audran, Jean-

François Garreaud, Christiane Minazzoli, Pierre Vernier

**L'ŒIL DE VICHY** (1993)

Screenplay: Jean-Pierre Azéma and Robert O. Paxton

Commentary: Michel Bouquet

**L'ENFER** (1993)

Screenplay: Henri-Georges Clouzot

Adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

With the collaboration of José-André Lacour

for the original dialogues

**LA CÉRÉMONIE** (1995)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

and Caroline Eliacheff

Based on the novel *A Judgement in Stone* by Ruth Rendell

Principal actors: Isabelle Huppert, Sandrine Bonnaire, Jacqueline

Bisset, Jean-Pierre Cassel, Virginie Ledoyen

**RIEN NE VA PLUS** (1997)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

Principal actors: Isabelle Huppert, Michel Serrault, François Cluzet,

Jean-François Balmer, Jackie Berroyer

**AU CŒUR DU MENSONGE** (1998)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol and Odile Barski

Principal actors: Sandrine Bonnaire, Jacques Gamblin, Valeria

Bruni-Tedeschi, Antoine de Caunes, Bernard Verley,

Bulle Ogier

**MERCI POUR LE CHOCOLAT** (2000)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol and

Caroline Eliacheff

Based on the novel *The Chocolate Cobweb* by Charlotte Armstrong

Principal actors: Isabelle Huppert, Jacques Dutronc,

Anna Mouglalis, Brigitte Catillon

**LA FLEUR DU MAL** (2002)

Screenplay: Claude Chabrol, Caroline Eliacheff and Louise Lambrichs

Principal actors: Benoît Magimel, Nathalie Baye, Mélanie Doutey,

Suzanne Flon, Bernard Le Coq, Thomas Chabrol

**LA DEMOISELLE D'HONNEUR** (2004)

Screenplay, adaptation and dialogues: Claude Chabrol and Pierre Leccia

Based on the novel *The Bridesmaid* by Ruth Rendell

Principal actors: Benoît Magimel, Laura Smet, Aurore Clément,

Bernard Le Coq, Michel Duchaussoy, Suzanne Flon

**L'IVRESSE DU POUVOIR** (2006)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol and Odile Barski

Principal actors: Isabelle Huppert, François Berléand, Patrick Bruel,

Marilyne Canto, Robin Renucci, Thomas Chabrol,

Jean-François Balmer, Pierre Vernier

**LA FILLE COUPÉE EN DEUX** (2007)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol and Cécile Maistre

Principal actors: Ludivine Sagnier, Benoît Magimel, François

Berléand, Mathilda May, Caroline Sihol, Édouard Baer

**BELLAMY** (2009)

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol and Odile Barski

Principal actors: Gérard Depardieu, Clovis Cornillac, Marie Bunel,

Jacques Gamblin, Vahina Giocante, Marie Matheron, Adrienne Pauly

**Shorts**

**L'AVARICE** (1961)

[Chabrol's contribution to *Les Sept Péchés capitaux*]

Screenplay and dialogues: Félicien Marceau

With: Danièle Barraud, Jacques Charrier, Jean-Claude Brialy, Claude Rich, Sacha Briquet, Claude Berri, Jean-Pierre Cassel

**L'HOMME QUI VENDIT LA TOUR EIFFEL** (1963)

[Chabrol's contribution to *Les Plus Belles Escroqueries du monde*]

Screenplay and dialogues: Paul Gégauff

With: Jean-Pierre Cassel, Francis Blanche, Catherine Deneuve

**LA MUETTE** (1964)

[Chabrol's contribution to *Paris vu par...*]

Screenplay and dialogues: Claude Chabrol

With: Claude Chabrol, Stéphane Audran.

**TV**

**LE BANC DE LA DÉSOLATION** (1974)

(51 min.)

(Series: *Nouvelles de Henry James*)

**MONSIEUR BÉBÉ** (1974), 53 min.

**NUL N'EST PARFAIT** (1974), 52 min.

**UNE INVITATION À LA CHASSE** (1974), 52 min.

**LES GENS DE L'ÉTÉ** (1974), 55 min.

(Series: *Histoire insolites*)

**DE GREY, UN RÉCIT ROMANESQUE** (1976), 48 min

(Series: *Nouvelles de Henry James*)

**2 + 2 = 4** (1978), 88 min.

(Series: *Madame le juge*)

**MONSIEUR SAINT-SAËNS [1835-1921]** (1978), 28 min

(Series: *Il était un musicien*)

**LA BOUCLE D'OREILLE** (1979), 53 min.

(Series: *Histoire insolites*)

**MONSIEUR PROKOFIEV [1891-1953]** (1979), 28 min.

(Series: *Il était un musicien*)

**MONSIEUR LISZT** [1811-1886] (1979), 27 min.

(Series: *Il était un musicien*)

**L'ECHAFAUD MAGIQUE** (1980), 93 min.

(Series: *Fantômas*)

**LE TRAMWAY FANTÔME** (1980), 88 min.

(Series: *Fantômas*)

**LE SYSTÈME DU DOCTEUR GOUDRON ET DU PROFESSEUR PLUME** (1981), 55 min.

(Series: *Nouvelles d'Edgar Allan Poe*)

**LES AFFINITÉS ÉLECTIVES** (1981), 117 min.

[Based on Goethe]

**M. LE MAUDIT** (1982), 10 min.

(For 'Cinémas Cinémas')

**LA DANSE DE MORT** (1982), 123 min.

Based on Strindberg

**L'ESCARGOT NOIR** (1987), 88 min.

(Series: *Les Dossiers de l'Inspecteur Lavardin*)

**MAUX CROISÉS** (1988), 90 min.

(Series: *Les Dossiers de l'Inspecteur Lavardin*)

**COUP DE VICE** (2001)

(Series: *Les Redoutables*)

**LA PARURE** (2007), 30 min.

(Series: *Chez Maupassant*)

**LE PETIT FÛT** (2008), 30 min.

(Series: *Chez Maupassant*)

**LE PETIT VIEUX DES BATIGNOLLES** (2009), 52 min.

(Series: *Au siècle de Maupassant, contes et nouvelles du XIXe siècle*)

**LE FAUTEUIL HANTÉ** (2009), 52 min.

(Series: *Au siècle de Maupassant, contes et nouvelles du XIXe siècle*)

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